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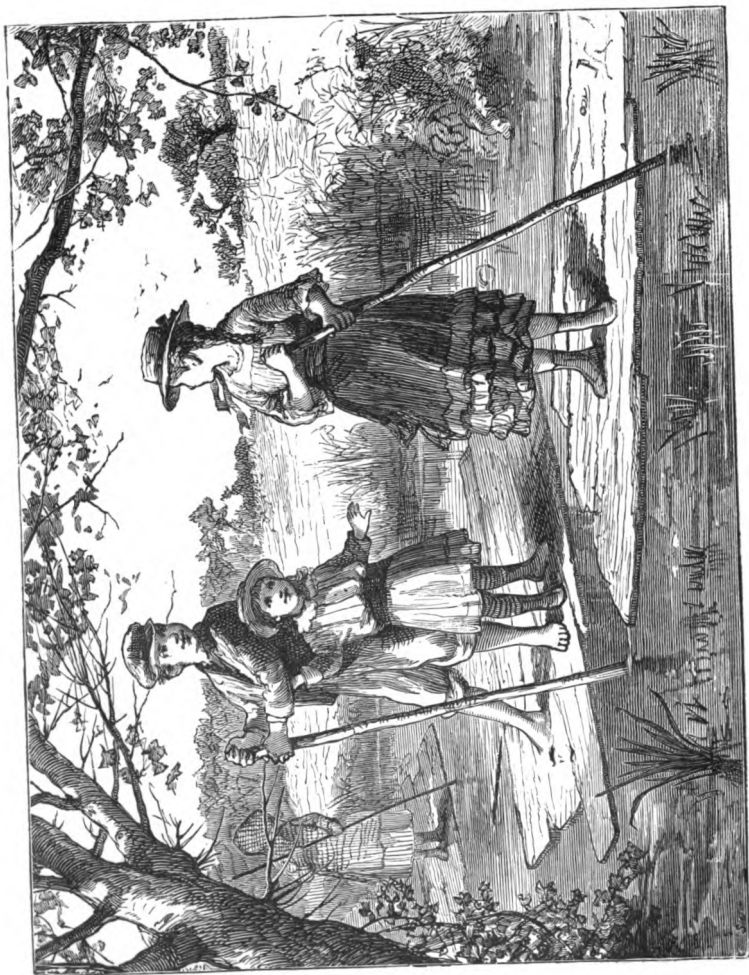


Nimpo's troubles



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Frontispiece.

IN THIS WAY THEY WENT UP AND DOWN THE CREEK AND HAD ENJOYMENT " "

IMPROVISED TROUBLE

BY
MRS. J. E. B. G. M. M. M.
AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE GIRL" &c.



SIMPSON SAW THAT SOME OF THE LITTLE GIRLS WERE IN THE STREET

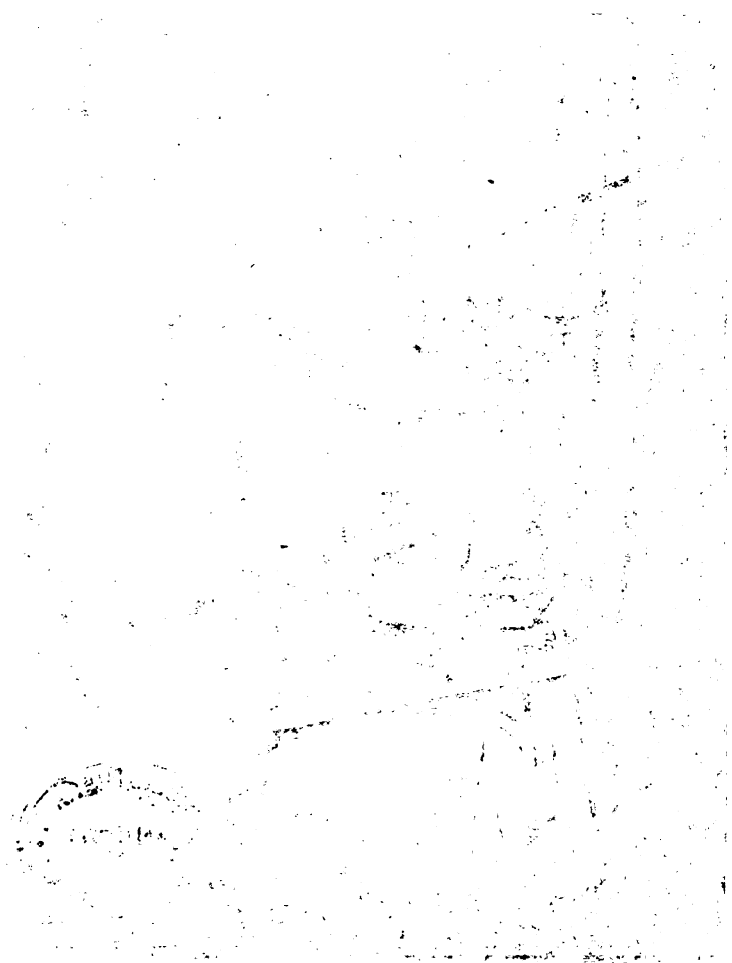
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GRIFFITH & FARRAN

SUCCESSORS TO NEWBURY & HARRIS

CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S AND CHURCH LANE, LONDON

E. P. DUTTON & CO., NEW YORK.



NIMPO'S TROUBLES

BY

OLIVE THORNE MILLER

Author of "Little Folks in Feathers and Fur," etc.



NIMPO SAW THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG.—Page 121

ILLUSTRATED BY MARY HALLOCK AND SOL. EYTINGE

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DEAR LITTLE PEOPLE :

Many of you young readers of St. Nicholas, who became interested in Nimpo, and her troubles in "doing as she pleased," have begged me to put her into a book,—as a warning, perhaps.

So here she is, in a beautiful book for you, with all her old troubles and many that have not been told before. I hope you'll like her as well in her new dress as you did in her old one.

OLIVE THORNE MILLER.

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NIMPO'S TROUBLES.



CHAPTER I.

GOING OUT TO BOARD.

THIS is the story of a real girl, no wiser and no better than you are. I hope you'll like her; and I'm sure you'll be interested to hear about her troubles. They were many and grievous, but the greatest of all was, that she could not do as she pleased.

Now, I shouldn't be surprised if that were your special trouble too; and I'm going to tell you what Nimpo did about it.

Nimpo wasn't her real name, of course; it was one she had given herself before she could speak plainly, and she never had been able to get rid of it.

She had a habit of talking to herself, and the

day my story begins, she had locked herself in her room, and was going on in a most passionate way:

"I don't believe any body has such a hard time as I have! I never can do as I please! Here I am, 'most thirteen, and I never did as I had a mind to, a single day! I just think it's too bad!

"Mother *never* lets me go anywhere I want to,—at least, not unless every little thing is just *so*," she added, to qualify the rather sweeping remark.

"I think she's horrid particular, anyway. Then she never lets me wear my new dress! I don't see any use of having a dress if you can't wear it, except just to church. Oh, dear! I do wish I could do as I please! Wouldn't I have a nice time?"

Having talked out her grief, though only to the unsympathizing walls, Nimpo felt better, and began to plan what she would do if that nice time should ever come. Her face brightened, and before long she was so deep in castle-building that

she forgot her troubles, and when the tea bell rang she went pleasantly down-stairs, not a bit like the abused damsel she thought herself.

Perhaps it was because "coming events cast their shadows before," for her nice time was much nearer than she thought. They were all at the table, when she took her place, and holding an animated discussion.

"Nimpo," said her father, "I'm going to take your mother with me to New York next week. How shall you like to keep house?"

"Are you—is he, mother?" exclaimed Nimpo, "and may I keep house?"

"I'm thinking about it," replied Mrs. Rievor, "but I don't see exactly how to arrange it. Sarah wants to go home for a month, or I could leave you with her. Perhaps I can get Mrs. Jackson to come and take care of you all."

"Oh, no! I can't bear Mrs. Jackson," Nimpo broke in; "mayn't I board somewhere?"

"That might do, Mary," said Mr. Rievor. "Perhaps that would be best. You would feel easier about them."

"I don't know who would take the care of three children on their hands," said Mrs. Rievor.

"Children!" said Nimpo, "I should think I was old enough to take care of myself."

Mrs. Rievor looked curiously at Nimpo, a moment, and a light seemed to break in on her mind. She thought, perhaps, it would be well for her little daughter to take care of herself awhile. So she said she would think of it.

Well, she did think of it, and she went out the next morning to see about it, and when Nimpo came home from school she was greeted with a shout from Rush, who was swinging on the front gate.

"Oh, Nimpo! It's all settled, and we're going to Mrs. Primkins' to board. Ain't you glad?"

"I guess you'll have to learn better manners than to swing on a gate, if you're going to board out," said Nimpo, with great dignity. "I should be mortified to have Mrs. Primkins see such rude manners;" and she went into the house to see if the delightful news was really true.

"Oh, my! don't we feel grand!" shouted Rush,

who was just at the teasing age in boys—if you know what age that is. According to my experience, it begins at nine or ten years of age, and ends—when does it end, boys?

But, for once, Nimpo did not care what he said. She was too much elated with her brilliant prospects to listen to him.

“Mother, have you got us a boarding place?” she asked, eagerly.

Mrs. Rievor smiled.

“Yes, dear; at least, Mrs. Primkins says she will take you, if, on the whole, it is decided to be best.”

“Oh, I hope it will, mother! I don’t want to stay here with that poky old Mrs. Jackson, to order me around.”

“But you will find things very different there from what you are used to, my dear, and I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed.”

“Of course, things’ll be different,” said Nimpo, loftily, “but I think I’d like a change. I don’t think it’s good for folks to live always in a rut.” She had read that expression in a grown-up book,

and thought it sounded striking. But, seeing a peculiar smile on her mother's face, she went on earnestly—

“I always did want to board out, mother, and I think it'll be just splendid.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Rievor, “perhaps it will be good for you, and if you prefer, you may try it.”

So that was settled, and Nimpo thought her day of glory was coming in.

She went at once to her room, drew her trunk out of the closet, and began to look over her “things,” to see which she would take. It was delightful to select them, and pack them away in boxes, and it made her feel as if she were going on a journey.

Rush was excited, too, though of course—being a boy—he would not own it. Pretty soon he came in.

“What'r you doing, Nimp?” he asked.

“Packing up,” said Nimpo, from the closet, where she had gone to get her best shoes, so as to be sure and not forget them.

“Then we're to go, sure pop?”

"Yes, we're to go to Mrs. Primkins' to board, but I do wish you'd leave off such vulgar words," answered Nimpo.

"I mean to pack up, too," said he, prudently not hearing her last remark. "Nimp, would you take your skates?"

"Skates!—in the middle of summer!" said she scornfully. "I think you'd better take a little common sense—if you have any in your head. I wish you'd go out; you're in my way. I want to spread out my things on that bed."

Nimpo's room was a cosy bit of a place, with only room for a narrow bed, a little bureau, a stand, and one chair. So when Rush came in to see her, he always sat or lounged on the bed.

Before she went to sleep on that wonderful night, Nimpo had packed every thing, except her dresses, and as it was a week before she went, she had to live in the trunk all that time.

But that—though rather inconvenient—was part of the fun.

She was a heroine at school for that week, the envy of the girls, and the happiest one of

all. Lessons were not very well learned, notes passed around, and in fact the whole school, which was not so large as schools are nowadays, was demoralized by her influence, because she was going to "board out," that being considered the height of felicity among the girls of the village.

The airs she put on were wonderful to see. She did up her hair in a very tight knot behind, feeling too old for braids, and silyly let down a tuck in her dress.

You see she wasn't a bit like the good girls you read about; she was more like the girls you see—when you look in the glass.

Well, the week came to an end, as all weeks will if we're only patient, and the morning came on which Mr. and Mrs. Rievor were to start.

"Now, Nimpo," said her mother that morning, "I leave little Robbie to your tender care. Remember he's a baby, and will miss his mother. I'm sure you'll be kind to him, dear. And I want you to be more considerate with Rush. I know he is trying—"

"I should think he was!" broke in Nimpo.

"Well, I know he is; but it's only his rough way. Try to be patient with him. I want to speak to you of Mrs. Primkins, too. You'll find some things you're not used to, my dear, but I know she'll be kind to you, and I hope you will be respectful to her, and do as she wishes you to."

"Of course I shall be respectful, mother," said Nimpo, putting on her high and mighty air, "but I don't see why I should mind her. I'm sure I'm old enough to know what's right for me to do. I shall only be a boarder, any way."

"Well, daughter," were Mrs. Rievor's last words, "I hope you will be as happy as you expect."

"There's the stage!" shouted Rush from the front gate; and, sure enough, the old red stage, with its four white horses, came sweeping around the corner, and stopped at the gate.

In a moment the trunks were strapped in the big "boot" behind. Father and mother said good-by, and were packed in, the driver climbed to his seat, cracked his whip, and off they went,

leaving Nimpo, Rush and Robbie at the gate, and black Sarah at the door.

Robbie began to cry, and even Rush felt a slight choke in his throat, but Nimpo was too much taken up with her brilliant prospect to feel unhappy.

"Now, Robbie," she began, in her most elder-sisterly way, "don't cry, dear; we're going up to our boarding place, and you'll see what fine times we'll have!"

"Hadn't ye better stay here till arter dinner?" said Sarah. "I won't get done clarin up 'fore the arternoon, an' I kin jist as well cook y'r dinner."

"No, I thank you, Sarah," said Nimpo, loftily, "I want to take possession of my new rooms this morning."

Sarah smiled, but Rush shouted:

"Nimp's on her stilts again! I say, Nimp, don't forget to take the big dictionary up to old Primkins'. They'll all have to study it if you keep on."

Nimpo threw a most withering look on him,

but he didn't wither a bit. He only laughed louder, and Sarah said quietly,

"Law, now! I reckon ye'll git off that ar high hoss, 'fore you've been to Miss Primkins' a week. She ain't much like y'r ma, no ways."

Nimpo disdained reply.

"You can leave the key of the house with Cousin Will, at the store, Sarah," she said with dignity.

"Yes, Miss Rievor," said Sarah, sarcastically. "So y'r ma tole me. Lor'! won't she git took down a peg!" she added, with a laugh to herself, the next minute, as Nimpo disappeared through the door.

The trunks had been removed the day before; so nothing remained but to walk up there.

Nimpo started off, leading Robbie, and Rush, stopping to gather up a bow and arrow he was making, followed closely along behind.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. PRIMKINS.

MRS. PRIMKINS lived in a two-story brick house, a block or two above Mr. Rievor's. It was the newest and most stylish-looking house on the street, and that was one reason Nimpo was pleased to go there.

Mrs. Primkins, however, was not stylish in the least. Her hair was cut short in her neck, her dress was short and scant, and in her whole figure there was a tightened-up ready-for-action look, that meant work. In fact, she was a kind-hearted, uneducated woman, whose life was spent in her kitchen, and who knew very little out of it.

She consented to take the children to board, because she wanted money to furnish her half-empty rooms.

When Nimpo reached the house, she went up to the front door, and finding no bell, gave a delicate, lady-like knock.

No reply.

She knocked again, louder this time. In a moment she heard a window opened, and Augusta Primkins put her head out.

"Go 'round the back way," she screamed.

"Well, I never!" said Nimpo, tossing her head; but she went, and there she found Mrs. Primkins washing dishes.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Primkins," she said. "I knocked at the front door, but could not make you hear."

"Laws!" cried Mrs. Primkins, stopping to look at her. "Why didn't you come right around? I don't expect to make company of you;" and she returned to her dish-pan.

"Will you be kind enough to show me my rooms?" asked Nimpo, with her grandest, young-ladylike air.

Mrs. Primkins stopped now in earnest, stood a moment looking at the pompous young figure

in the doorway, laughed a little to herself, wiped her hands on her apron, and then went to a door which seemed to lead up-stairs.

"Au-gus-tee!" she screamed.

"Ma'am," came faintly down from the attic.

"Them Rievor children's come; you show them their rooms."

"Children, again!" thought poor Nimpo. "I'll soon show them I'm no child."

"I s'pose you'd 's'lieves go up the back way?" said Mrs. Primkins, holding open the door.

"It makes no difference," said Nimpo, haughtily, and up she went.

When she got to the head of the stairs, she looked around for Augusta, but a voice came from above—

"Come up-stairs, children."

Nimpo hesitated, and Mrs. Primkins called from below—

"Take the little door at your left hand."

Then Nimpo saw a narrow, unpainted door, which she opened. There was the next flight of stairs, regular garret stairs, narrow and steep.

Up these she climbed, her heart boiling over with wrath.

"It can't be possible!" she said to herself, "that that horrid woman means to put us in the attic!"

But she did; for there stood Augusta at the head of the landing, and she pointed to two small, unpainted doors, on one side of the attic.

"Those are your rooms. You can divide them as you like."

"But I thought—but can't we have rooms down-stairs?" stammered Nimpo, with tears of vexation in her eyes.

Augusta looked at her with surprise.

"There ain't a stick of furniture in the chambers. This is my room," and she opened the door of the front attic, showing a broad room, the whole width of the house, with a droll window half across the front. This window was in the peak of the roof, and, of course, it could not go up; so it was arranged with hinges, and hung down into the room. It was now open, and it looked as though half the wall was out.

Nimpo turned away, and with a swelling heart, opened one of the other doors.

The room was a small one, with sloping roof on one side. A bed was pushed under this low part, and before it stood a cheap stand and one wooden chair. A window at the end looked out upon a roof, and the kitchen chimney smoked away only five or six feet from the sash.

There was an awful crash of air castles in Nimpo's heart. She turned to look at the other room, but found it even worse; for it had no wash-stand at all. She returned, drew Robbie in, shut the door, sat down on the foot of the bed, and—burst into tears.

"Don't cry, Nimp," said Rush, by way of consolation, while Robbie climbed up by her and said:

"This room's too up high; that wall's going to fall down."

"It's real mean, anyhow," Rush went on, "to put us up in the garret like this. It ain't half so good as our house, for all it looks so grand!"

"Mean!" said Nimpo, who had recovered her voice. "It's horrid! the stingy old thing! I'll

bet she didn't tell mother where she was going to put us! I'll never stay here—never—! You see if I do."

"What you going to do?" asked Rush, when he saw Nimpo jerk her bonnet from its peg.

"I'm going straight to the store to see Cousin Will," she answered; "I know he'll help us somehow. I won't stay here a minute."

She stalked down-stairs, the two boys still following her. Mrs. Primkins was not in the kitchen, so they got out without being seen, and hastened to their father's store.

"Cousin Will," Nimpo began passionately the moment she saw him, "I want you to get us another boarding place."

"Why, Nimpo, your mother made arrangements for you," answered Will.

"I know it; but that horrid Mrs. Primkins gave us mean little rooms up in the attic, and I can't bear them. They're ever so much meaner than Sarah's room at our house, and I can't stand it,—so there!"

Cousin Will looked puzzled.

"Well, I don't see what I can do for you. Nobody takes boarders, you know,—except students,—and I don't see but what you'll have to stand it. It won't be long anyway; and you needn't stay much in your room, you know."

"But why can't I have Mrs. Jackson to keep house, as mother proposed?" asked Nimpo.

"Mrs. Jackson is taking care of Mrs. Smith, who is very sick. I know she wouldn't leave her," replied Cousin Will.

Nimpo's face fell.

"Oh, dear! it's too mean for any thing! I never have any thing as I want it!"

"But I'm sure this plan is yours; you refused to have Mrs. Jackson, yourself."

"So I did," said poor Nimpo; "but I never thought of being treated so."

"Well, I don't see what you can do," said Cousin Will, who evidently didn't think it a killing matter to sleep in an attic room. "I guess you'll have to 'grin and bear it,' as Sarah says."

"Let's go home," suggested Rush. "Sarah's there yet, and we'll make her stay."

But Nimpo remembered the lofty airs she had put on that very morning, and she couldn't bear to come down to Sarah. So she called her pride to her aid, and made a resolve.

"No, Rush, we'll go back there and stand it. It's horrid mean of her; but we needn't stay in the rooms, you know, and we'll have some fun, anyway."

So back they went.

They had not been there long before the lower door opened, and a shrill scream came up:

"Come to dinner, children!"

"Children, again!" said Nimpo. "I'll show her—"

They found the dinner table in the kitchen, to Nimpo's horror.

"You may set right down there," said Mrs. Primkins, pointing to a chair on one side of the table, "and Robbie can have the high chair next to you. You, Rush, set down by Augusty."

They took their seats. Mr. Primkins was already in his place. Nimpo tied on Robbie's bib, and looked around. I don't suppose she would

really have cared much how her dinner was served, if she hadn't dreamed so much, and worse yet, said so much, about the "style" of boarding. But the dishes of coarse crockery, with blue edges, such as they used at home to bake pies on, the big, awkward knives and two-tined forks, the unbleached table-cloth, the square table, with leaves propped up, so that you had to be careful not to hit the leg, or you might have your dinner in your lap—all these together were dreadful troubles just then.

Then there was the great piece of corned beef,—which she never could eat, and whole potatoes,—which she hated to peel, and boiled cabbage,—which she could just manage to swallow.

Mr. Primkins did not ask her what she would have. He piled a plate up with beef, potatoes, and cabbage, and handed it over to her in such a matter-of-course way, that she could not say a word. He did the same with Rush. Rush was hungry,—did you ever know a boy who wasn't?—and he proceeded to dispose of his plateful; but Robbie began to fret.

"Nimpo, I don't want that meat. I want some fat meat. I don't like that potato; it's a black potato."

"Never mind!" whispered Nimpo, blushing; "I'll fix it."

"Don't fix it!—take away that meat!" Robbie went on, ready to cry.

Nimpo hastily slipped the meat upon her own plate, peeled Robbie's potato, and mashed it for him, gave him a piece of fat from her plate, and after awhile, with burning cheeks, was ready to cram her own dinner down.

Meanwhile, Rush had emptied his plate, and passed it up for more, at which Mrs. Primkins, who was nibbling around the edge of hers, said:

"Dear! dear! what an appetite boys do have!"—adding, as she saw Nimpo's indignant face:

"What wouldn't I give if I could eat like a boy!"

"Let him eat," was Mr. Primkin's reply, between two mouthfuls, "he's a-growin'."

That was the only remark he made. As soon as he had finished his meal, he pushed back his

chair, took his hat and went out. Mrs. Primkins also left the table the moment she had finished, and, finally, Nimpo found herself left alone with Robbie, who was very slow to eat, lingering as little folk will.

"Come, bub, ain't you through?" said Mrs. Primkins. "I can't dawdle round all day. I want to get the dishes done up."

Nimpo hurried him off, and rushed up-stairs once more, in a blaze of indignation, while Mrs. Primkins said to herself, as she cleared the table—

"Too many airs for my time o' day! the pert little huzzy! can't eat corned beef! humph! I'll have to take her down a bit, 'fore I can live with her," and by the way the table-cloth was jerked off, you'd think she meant to do it, too.

CHAPTER III.

NIMPO DRESSES UP.

CLIMBING to the attic rooms again, Nimpo opened her trunk, and took out her dresses, which she hung on a row of nails at the foot of the bed.

Robbie looked on with great interest for a moment, then suddenly, to Nimpo's dismay, began to cry.

"I don't like it here," he sobbed; "I want to go home to mamma."

"Hush! Robbie," said his sister, kissing and soothing him, hurriedly; "never mind, dear. We'll dress up and go out to walk. We'll have some fun, if things *are* horrid here."

So, with another kiss, she put on his white suit and red boots, and then took down her new dress.

"Now I'll have the good of this dress, and I'll

show mother that I can wear it other days besides Sunday, and not spoil it," she said to herself.

The dress was of blue *barege*. She put it on, with her best cloth boots, and her blue sash.

"What for you dressed all up?" asked Robbie, rubbing his eyes.

"Because I'm going out to walk. Mother puts on her best dress when she goes out—sometimes," she added, for she felt a little guilty; "I don't see why I shouldn't do so too."

"Ain't you a very pretty girl?" asked Robbie, earnestly, after studying the effect of the blue dress for some minutes.

"Do you think I am?" asked Nimpo, laughing.

"P'raps you are. I sink so," said Robbie.

"Well, you're a darling little rose-bud!" said Nimpo, giving him a spasmodic hug.

"Ain't I a pretty big rose-bud?" asked Robbie, seriously, "and 'sides, where's my stem?"

"Oh, you're the kind of rose-bud that has legs, and don't need a stem," said Nimpo, starting down-stairs.

"I'm not going down the kitchen way," said

she, when they reached the foot of the attic stairs. "I guess I'm a boarder!" and feeling very haughty and fine, she went down the front stairs.

Mrs. Primkins heard them and opened the kitchen door.

"I don't want you to go up and down that way," she said, "tramping up my stair carpet. You can use the back stairs—like the rest of us."

Nimpo made no reply, but started for the front door."

"Don't go out that way!" screamed Mrs. Primkins; "I can't be running round to lock doors after a parcel of young ones, not by a jug-full! Come out the back door."

Swelling with indignation, Nimpo turned.

"I am accustomed to go out the front door at home, Mrs. Primkins."

"Wall, you ain't to home now, and you needn't tramp up my front hall. I can tell you that. I don't want every thing going to rack and ruin, and I hain't got no servants to sweep out after you, as your ma has."

So they went out the back door, and took their way down town.

Now, in that little western village set down in the woods of Ohio, children did not dress finely every day; so, when Nimpo appeared on the street in her blue *barege*, she attracted a good deal of notice. Every one said, "Why! where are you going, Nimpo?"

She enjoyed it for awhile, but finally she began to be annoyed.

"Just as if one couldn't dress up without having every body act so! I do think the people in this town are dreadfully countrified!" she said to herself.

When she came to the school-house the girls were out at recess.

"There's Nimpo!" some one shouted, and in a moment she was surrounded by a crowd of eager schoolmates.

"Where're you going?" was the first question, and then, "How do you like it?" "Are you having a nice time?" "Ain't it splendid to do as you're a mind to?" etc., etc.

“O, girls!” said Nimpo, “it’s perfectly horrid there. They eat with two-tined forks! and don’t have napkins! Mrs. Primkins is a vulgar woman, and a tyrant. But I don’t care, I sha’n’t mind her. I have to sleep in the garret, and I ’most know there’s rats in the wall.”

“Oh my!” and “Oh it’s too bad!” and “Write to your mother to come home,” and other expressions of sympathy followed this announcement, until Nimpo suddenly felt that she was a heroine. She had read stories about those suffering individuals, and began to think since she couldn’t be stylish, she would be a persecuted heroine.

Now, you must know that Nimpo was very fond of reading, and read every book she could beg or borrow. And the books she borrowed of the school girls were not at all like yours; far from it! they were always in two or three small, dark-covered volumes, and the stories were the histories of interesting damsels who were persecuted and tormented from the title page to the very last leaf of the book.

Nimpo had read several of these—inside of her

geography, at school (for she knew her mother would object to them)—and she thought it would be interesting to adopt that role.

"Of course it's frightful staying there," she began; "but then, I suppose, one must expect troubles everywhere, and, if nothing very dreadful happens, I suppose I can endure it."

"Just see Nimpo take on airs!" said Ellen Lumbar, in a low tone; "I never saw any one so affected!"

But Nimpo did not hear, and she went on more naturally—

"To-morrow is Saturday; and I'm coming to see one of you girls."

"Oh, me! me!" said half a dozen.

"Well, I guess I'll begin with Nanny Cole," said she. "Of course, I'll have to bring Robbie."

"Oh, of course!" said Nanny, snatching him out of the arms of the twentieth girl who had kissed him, and said he was "as sweet as he could be," since Nimpo had been talking, "and be sure you come early. We'll play on the creek. We can build dams, and have ever so much fun."

So it was agreed; and as the bell began ringing just then, the girls went in, and Nimpo and Robbie continued their walk.

After awhile they went to the store, where they found Rush making a big pile of old barrels, and such rubbish, for a bonfire in the back yard. Robbie wanted to help; so Nimpo sat on the back steps and read a book that one of the girls had lent her, till it was time to go home.

"Wall! wall! if that young one ain't a sight to behold!" exclaimed Mrs. Primkins, when she caught sight of Robbie.

He was dreadfully dirty,—for the old barrel staves and bits of boards that he had been carrying were not of the cleanest.

"He'd ought to have good long-sleeved checked aprons," said Mrs. Primkins, severely, "and I've as good a mind to make him some as ever I had to eat. Them stains'll never come out."

"He should never wear one—never!" Nimpo thought, angrily, but she said nothing. And perhaps Mrs. Primkins saw it in her face; for the checked-apron subject was never renewed.

When supper was ready, there was nothing on the table but a plate of bread, and a bowl of milk, and Mrs. Primkins' cup of tea.

Mr. Primkins put a slice of bread on his plate, and passed the bread to the rest. Then, taking the bowl of milk, he dipped out a few spoonfuls to cover his slice of bread, and put the bowl before Rush, who sat next. Having ended his duties as host, he then took up his knife and fork and began to cut up and eat his bread and milk.

Rush had not noticed him, and seeing the bowl of milk near him, supposed it was for him, so he took it upon his plate, and innocently began to crumb his bread into it.

Nimpo was horrified; though to be sure, she had never seen bread and milk eaten in the Primkins' style.

Mrs. Primkins got up with a low "Humph!" and brought another bowl of milk, while Augusta laughed, and even Mr. Primkins relaxed enough to grin and say:

"Hope you like milk, sonny!"

"Yes, I do,—first-rate," said Rush, innocently.

After tea, all the children went into the yard and played "tag," till bed-time. Of course, Nimpo tore her new dress on the fence; but it was in the back breadth, and she thought she could sew it up. So, after all, she didn't care much for that.

She was sorry that Robbie had soiled his white suit, so that he could not wear it to Nanny's next day.

"Never mind!" she said to herself, "his buff linen is clean, and that will do well enough."

CHAPTER IV.

NIMPO MEETS WITH AN ACCIDENT.

NIMPO slept very well,—if it was in an attic room—and the next morning she was up bright and early to get ready for Nanny Cole's, though she did not intend to go till afternoon. When she began to dress she could find no washing conveniences, so she went across the attic to Augusta's room.

"There's no wash-bowl in my room," said she.

"We don't use wash-bowls," said Augusta; "we wash in the wood-shed when we go down. There's always a basin and towel there."

"But I never washed in a wood-shed," said Nimpo passionately, "and I never will! I'll bring some things from home this very day." And she rushed back to her room, too indignant to cry even.

Augusta seemed amazed at her spirit, for she went down-stairs and soon returned with a tin basin half full of water, and a brown towel.

"Ma says you can have this in your room, if you're so dreadful particular," and she set it down.

Nimpo took it silently, and after that she had fresh water for her own use (when she didn't forget to bring it up); but Rush washed in the woodshed and said it was first-rate, "'Cause a fellow could spatter as much as he liked."

After breakfast, Nimpo sat down to mend her torn dress. She sewed up the rent as well as she could,—with white thread,—and then to pass away the time till dinner, she thought she would write to her mother, as she had promised to do. She got her little portfolio, which her mother had filled nicely with paper, and in one pocket of which were four new stiff quill pens, which her father had made for her. Nimpo had never heard of a gold pen, and no doubt she would have scorned the very idea of a steel pen. Seating herself by the window, with a thin book

on her knees, she took a sheet of paper and wrote:

DEAR MOTHER,

It's horrid here. I don't like it a bit. We sleep in a mean little hole in the attic, and I'm sure there's rats in the wall.

They have two-tined forks to eat with, and eat bread and milk on a plate. I tore my blue dress, but mended it just as nice. Don't forget to bring me a book of poems.

The girls pity me. I'm going to spend the afternoon with Nanny Cole. I haven't any drawers to put my things in.

Give my love to Neal and Mate if you have got there. It is dinner-time now, so good-by.

Your affectionate daughter,

NIMPO RIEVOR.

When this letter was finished, Nimpo folded it in a way that I don't suppose you ever heard of—for envelopes were not in fashion then, any more than steel pens. She next lighted a candle which she had brought up-stairs when she came, took a stick of sealing wax and a glass stamp out of the portfolio, and made a neat round seal on the back of the letter. She then put it into her pocket to take to Cousin Will to direct.

Nanny Cole lived at the edge of the village, and very near the woods. There was also a shallow creek close by, in which the children were allowed to play, for it was not considered deep enough to be dangerous. With all these attractions, Nanny's house was a favorite place to visit, especially with Nimpo, who never could get enough of the woods.

As she and Robbie approached the house, Nanny and her brother came out, and they all went to the woods. First they got their hands and arms full of wild flowers, moss, acorns and pine cones, and when at last they could carry no more, they found a pretty place for a house.

It was against the roots of a large tree, which had blown down. The great bundle of roots, higher than their heads, and full of earth, stood up straight, and before it was the hole it had left. This droll house they adorned with their treasures, making a carpet of moss, and bouquets of the flowers, which they stuck into cracks in the great root.

When the house was finished they played awhile.

Then finding a flat stone for a table, they spread it with cookies from a basket Mrs. Cole had given them.

They spent some time over this meal, eating from plates of clean birch bark, and drinking "white tea" out of dainty acorn cups.

Then John proposed they should go and play on the creek, and down they went. For some time they built dams where the water was very shallow. Then they sailed boats made of pieces of bark, loaded with small pebbles, which they called bags of wheat, or with passengers—made of pieces of twigs, with acorn cups for hats. These boats all started off bravely, and sailed gaily down the creek for a few rods, but there the current took them towards a rock in the middle of the stream, and against that nearly every one of them was wrecked. If it passed, it was sure to be capsized in a little eddy just beyond.

After enjoying this a long time, John proposed that they all should sail about on boards. Of course, Nimpo was ready for that, so they each

got a board, and took a long pole with which to push their rafts along. In this way they went up and down the creek and had fine times.

Robbie was not big enough to have a boat by himself, so he sailed with John for awhile. But at last John thought he would go down through the rapids, as they called a place where the creek spread out wide, and was filled with large stones.

Nimpo told Robbie to come to her boat, and she pushed her board up towards John's, so that he could do it. Before she was quite ready Robbie jumped on, and coming so suddenly, upset the narrow raft and threw them both into the water.

It was not very dangerous, as I have said, for it was not deep, but it was very wet, and Nimpo fell her full length.

John and Nanny hurried to help her, and in a moment she stood on the bank, wet to the skin—and Robbie in the same plight. They hurried up to the house. Mrs. Cole wanted Nimpo to put on some of Nanny's clothes, and hang her own up to dry, but Nimpo would not consent.

She said she would stand by the kitchen fire and dry herself.

So by the fire she stood, one long hour that hot day, while Mrs. Cole took off Robbie's clothes and dried them. Even then she was not half dry. but she was tired and warm, and she thought she looked well enough to go through the streets.

But something ailed her dress, it would not dry straight. In spite of pulling and smoothing it would not "come right," and she saw very plainly that she could never wear it again.

"If Mrs. Primkins does her duty," said Mrs. Cole, as at last Nimpo and Robbie started for home, "she'll put you to bed, and give you a hot dose of ginger tea."

"I guess she won't," thought Nimpo, "for I won't tell her a word about it. I hate ginger tea."

It was nearly dusk when she entered the kitchen door, hoping to slip up-stairs before any one saw her. But Mrs. Primkins' eyes were sharp.

"Why, Nimpo Rievor! What on earth! Have you been in the water?"

Nimpo's heart sank.

"I got a little wet, up at Mrs. Cole's," said she.

"Got a little wet! I should think so! Did you fall in the creek up there?"

"Yes," faltered Nimpo, "but I'm all dry now."

"All dry! Humph! You've probably got your death o' cold. But I'll do my duty anyway, as I promised your ma. Little did I know what a chore it would be either," she muttered to herself, adding at once, "you go right straight to bed, and be spry about it too, and I'll come up there with a cup of tea for you."

Nimpo groaned, but did not dare to rebel, and besides, she was a little frightened about the "death o' cold." She didn't wish to die just yet.

She climbed to her room, undressed, put on dry clothes, and laid down on the bed.

In a few minutes Mrs. Primkins came up, in one hand a blanket, in the other a bowl. Putting the bowl on the stand, she first wrapped Nimpo in the blanket, which she had heated by the kitchen fire, and then she held the bowl to her lips and told her to drink every drop.

This tea was, indeed, "a horrid black stuff," very much worse than ginger tea. Nimpo choked and gasped and gagged, but swallowed it.

Mrs. Primkins smiled grimly, and gave her a lump of sugar to take the taste out of her mouth.

"Now, don't you stir hand or foot out of that blanket, however warm you get. If you don't get a good sweat you'll have a chill, sure's you live. When it's time for you to come out I'll run up or send Augusty;" and down-stairs she went.

This ended Nimpo's first whole day of liberty. She had a good chance to think it over as she lay there wide awake. She had spoiled her visit to Nanny, ruined her own nice dress and boots, and, perhaps, caught a dreadful cold and fever.

On the whole she had been unhappy ever since her mother left home, though she couldn't exactly see why.

"I wouldn't mind the wetting," she thought, as she lay there alone. "I could stand this horrid blanket, though I believe I shall smother—and that bad stuff!" shuddering as she thought of it; "but I know my dress is spoiled, and what *shall* I

do without a nice dress till mother gets back? And Helen Benson's birthday party next week? Oh, dear! why didn't I wear a clean calico and white apron as mother always made me?" And Nimpo's first day of freedom actually ended in a fit of tears.

But finally she cried herself to sleep, and when Mrs. Primkins came at bed-time, she found her just waking up and all cold gone.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST SUNDAY.

THE next day was Sunday, and Nimpo was up early, feeling the responsibility of getting the boys and herself ready for church and Sunday-school.

With all her desire for liberty, she never had so wild a dream as staying at home from church.

In fact, in that village, one who deliberately stayed at home when he was able to stand, was looked upon as a desperate sinner.

Nimpo did not feel prepared to face the public opinion of the whole town, especially as she was sure Mr. Binney,—the minister,—would notice her absence and speak about it.

So, though she had to wear a clean gingham dress and her school shoes, she dressed Robbie,

helped Rush put on his collar and tie his black neck-ribbon, and got ready herself.

As a last touch, after her hat was tied on, she took up her clean handkerchief by the middle fold, and shook it out so that the four corners hung together, and held it thus very carefully in her left hand.

Then she went to a corner of the garden and picked several bunches of green caraway or fennel, to keep her awake in church. These she held with her handkerchief, and taking Robbie's hand, she called to Rush to bring her Sunday-school book from the table, and away they went to the Sunday-school and church.

Sunday-school was at nine o'clock and church at half-past ten. So they did not get home till nearly one o'clock.

Then they ate a lunch of pie and doughnuts, with, perhaps, a glass of milk. And at half-past two they went to church again.

After that, the rest of the day was spent in reading Sunday-school books, getting next week's lesson, eating supper, and perhaps taking a nap.

Sometimes, when their mother was at home, if they were very quiet and would promise to walk slowly, they were allowed to take a walk to the graveyard.

But Mrs. Primkins did not approve of that; so after they had read their thin little Sunday-school books twice through (Nimpo used to wonder if they were so thin because the children were so very good that there wasn't much to say about them), and had looked at all the pictures in the big Bible, they were very glad to drag themselves off to bed at eight o'clock.

I tell you thus carefully about Nimpo's Sundays, because I want you to see how the world has become wiser since she was little, and how much more pleasant the day is made for you.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. PRIMKINS PUTS NIMPO TO WORK.

MONDAY morning came, and Rush got ready for school.

"I'm not going to school to-day," said Nimpo.

"Well, I am," said Rush. "It's awful dull here, and I can have some fun with the boys." And off he started.

Now, Nimpo felt rather lonesome; but one of the things she thought her mother was especially cruel about, was making her go to school every day, and, of course, the only way to enjoy her liberty was to stay at home.

Mrs. Primkins saw what she intended to do, and resolved to take her in hand. So after breakfast she said, coolly:

"Nimpo, I expect you to do your own washing while you are here. I have enough of my own, without washing such a raft of things as that,"

and she pointed to the pile of clothes Nimpo had put out.

It was rather a formidable pile,—three or four dresses, three or four linen suits for Robbie, as many for Rush, besides under-clothes, and such things.

Nimpo looked at it in dismay; but Mrs. Primkins went on:

“There’s a pail you can take; here’s a piece of soap, and you’ll find hot water on the stove.”

Now, Nimpo knew no more about washing than a butterfly; and her heart rebelled; but she didn’t quite dare to say any thing. So, gloomily she went to work. She filled the pail with water, seized a pair of Robbie’s knickerbockers, and began.

She rubbed and rubbed, and she soaped and soaped, and not a speck could she get out of those clothes. Her back ached; the skin seemed scalded from her hands; her dress was soaked from waist to hem.

But there was Augusta Primkins, not so very much older than she, up to her brown elbows

in suds, and working away with ease. So Nimpo's pride helped her, and she endured as long as she could. At last, when the pain of her raw fingers became intolerable, and the perspiration ran off her face in big drops, and an extra swish of the knickerbockers sent half the pail of suds over her clothes, she blazed up.

Throwing down the garment with a tragical air, she burst out with:

"Mrs. Primkins! my mother doesn't intend to educate me for a washerwoman. I will send my clothes to Mrs. Jackson!"

"I don't think your schoolin' is gitting much attention, since you come here," said Mrs. Primkins, dryly. "I don't think children git much good running around, trapesing all over the country, with nothing to do. Satan always finds some work for idle hands to do. So, if you don't go to school, why, you'll have to work in my house. There's no two ways about that. I'll wash your clothes now; you can do up the dishes."

Nimpo stalked from the wash-room into the kitchen, feeling that minding her was intolera-

ble, yet too well brought up to think of serious rebellion.

She washed the odious blue-edged dishes, feeling all the time an aching desire to pitch them out of the window. Then she went up-stairs, threw herself on the bed and had a good cry.

After awhile, she felt better, and rose and changed her wet clothes.

"I guess I'll go to school, if the mean old thing's going to make me wash dishes," she said to herself.

So in the afternoon she went to school. Miss Osgood was glad to see her, and so were the girls; and, to her own surprise, she felt happier than she had since her mother went away.

While they were bending over their geographies, rocking back and forth and moving their lips, apparently studying with all their might, Anna Morris, who sat next to Nimpo, and was her "best friend," whispered softly:

"Do you know Helen Benson's going to have her birthday party next Saturday?"

"Is she, truly?" asked Nimpo.

"Yes; true's I live and breathe and draw the breath of life," said Anna; "and most all the girls are invited; I am."

"I wonder if she isn't going to invite me!" said Nimpo.

"Oh, of course she will, only you wasn't here this morning. She isn't going to have any boys; her mother won't let her."

"I'm glad of that," said Nimpo; "boys are so rude."

"I ain't; I think it's real mean."

At recess, the birthday party was the great subject of conversation; and as soon as she saw Helen, Nimpo received her invitation.

The invitations were not much like those which young ladies of twelve years get nowadays, engraved or written as ceremoniously as their mammas', enclosed in a dainty envelope, and sent by a servant.

Helen just said to Nimpo:

"O, Nimpo, I want you to come to my party next Saturday."

"Well, I will," said Nimpo; and that was all.

The great question, "What are you going to wear?" came up next; and that was as important to these girls, with only one Sunday dress, as it is to you with your many.

Nimpo had no reply to make to the question. *Her* Sunday dress was ruined, and she did not know what she should do.

The girls pitied her, and had many suggestions to make. One advised her to hunt up a white dress which she had outgrown, and let it down; and another offered to lend her a dress of her older sister's, which would only need tucking up and taking in under the arms. But Nimpo was too proud to accept any such offer.

"If mother was home," she sighed, as she walked slowly home, "she would get me a new dress; I know she would."

As she passed her father's store, she went in, partly to see if any letters had come from her mother, and partly because she always did go in. Cousin Will happened to be in a pleasant mood,—he wasn't always,—and so Nimpo told him about the party and her spoilt dress.

"If mother was here, she'd get me a new one," she ended.

"I dare say she would," said Cousin Will, pitying the unhappy face of his little cousin, "and I'll tell you what I'll do, Nimpo. If you can find any body to make your dress, I'll take the responsibility of letting you have one out of the store."

"Oh! will you?" cried Nimpo. "Oh, I'll be so glad! But who can I get?" she added, soberly, a moment later. The ladies in that primitive town made their own dresses. They didn't have forty tucks or ruffles on them, I can tell you.

"Couldn't Sarah make it?" suggested Cousin Will.

"I don't know; perhaps so; she does sew sometimes; and come to think of it, she told me she used to sew for her old mistress. But she is away off at her sister's."

"Not so very far,—only a mile through the woods. Rush knows where, for he and I went there once to get her."

"Well, I'll go over and see her now," said Nimpo, excitedly. "Where's Rush?"

"He's out behind the store!" said Cousin Will.

Nimpo soon found him. He was delighted with the proposal to go to Sarah's.

They started off at once, calling a moment at Mrs. Morris' to get Anna to go, too.

Of course, all you young people know how delightful are walks in the woods; so I need not describe that part of it, only to say that they stopped so often to gather flowers, moss and other treasures, that when they got to Mrs. Johnson's, their arms and pockets and aprons were full.

Mrs. Johnson,—Sarah's sister,—lived in a long, low cabin made of logs, in the woods. She had a husband and six or eight children, and the entire family had emigrated from the South a few years before.

Sarah was busy, helping her sister spin, and was quite surprised to see Nimpo.

"How do you git on, boarding?" was her first question.

"Not very well," said Nimpo; "but, Sarah, I've come to see if you can't make me a new dress to go to Helen Benson's party?"

"La sakes now!" exclaimed Sarah. "Whar's that new blue frock y'r ma done made fur ye?"

"I spoiled it,—fell in the creek," said Nimpo.

"Go 'long, now! What ye s'pose y'r ma'll say?"

"I don't know," said Nimpo, penitently; "but will you make the dress? Cousin Will says I may have one, if you'll make it."

"Lor'! ye oughten'ter spile y'r cloze so. I don't see how I kin do it, no ways."

"Yes, Sarah," spoke up her sister; "make it fur the po' child. I kin help ye."

Nimpo turned gratefully to the speaker,—a big woman, with a fat black baby in her lap.

As Nimpo turned she saw a new attraction in an old basket in the corner,—a cat and a whole family of kittens.

"Oh, how cunning!" she cried, running over to them; "may I take one? Oh, ain't they lovely! How many are there?"

Anna and Rush, who had stood by the door, feeling rather awkward, came in, followed by the little Johnsons. All crowded at once around the basket.

"They're 'mazin' peart kittens," said Mrs. Johnson; "take one along, if ye want it."

"Oh, may I?—thank you," said Nimpo. "I'll be very glad to have one."

"Y'r welcome; they ain't much 'count, no way: th'other gal kin have one, too, and the boy,—if he wants it."

There was great excitement for a few minutes, looking over the family, and selecting the prettiest.

"May we take them now?" asked Nimpo.

"Sure nuff, if ye like to take 'em," replied Mrs. Johnson.

"Hadn't ye better wait till y'r ma done come back? Maybe Miss Primkin don't favor kittens," suggested Sarah.

"O, no!" said Nimpo and Rush, in the same breath; while Nimpo added, "She needn't see them; we'll keep them up-stairs. Indeed, I want mine now!" And she hugged her kitten as though she never could be separated from it.

When they were outside of the door, one of the Johnson boys stood there. He was one who had

been to their house to see Sarah, so they knew him a little.

"Want some nuts?" he asked, showing all his white teeth.

"Yes; have you got some?" asked Rush, eagerly.

"Heaps,—done found 'em in a squirrel's nest," said the boy, leading the way to a shed. Rush followed, while the girls sat down on a log, and compared kittens, discussing their points with great interest.

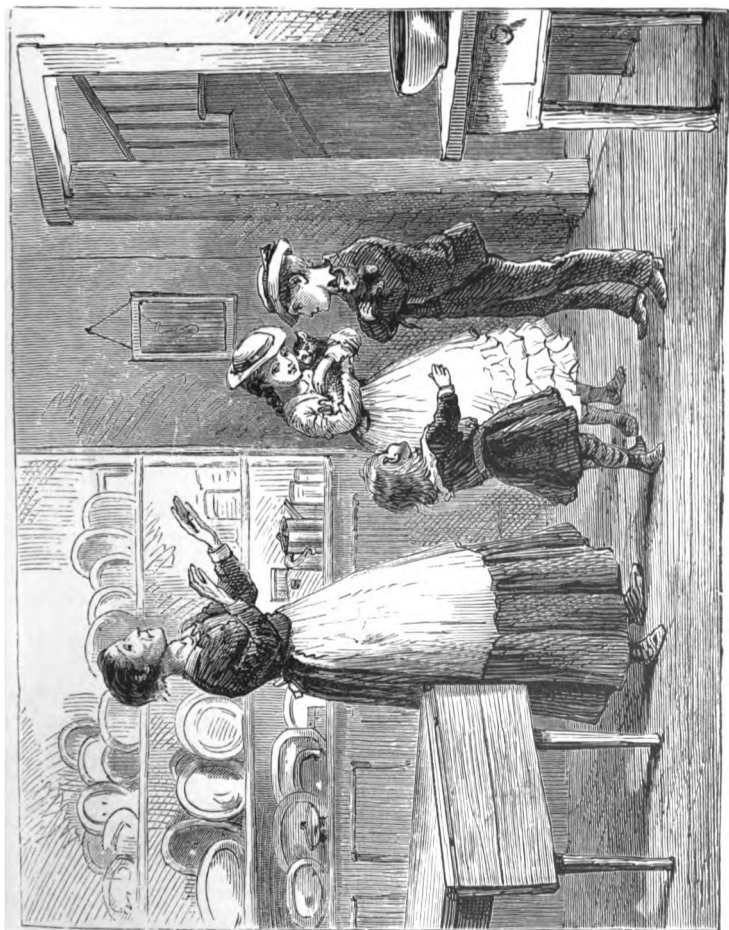
In the shed Rush saw a box that would hold half a bushel, nearly full of beech nuts, and every one shelled. They were as clean and neat as could be, and the boy filled all Rush's pockets to the very top, and told him he would give him more the next time he came.

Rush showed them to the girls with great glee, and offered them some, but they told him they preferred to shell their own nuts, and Nimpo said she thought it was abominable to steal away the winter food of a whole family.

"Poor little squirrel!" said she; "think how

long he had to work to take all those shells off, and you boys to go and steal them away! I think it's mean, so there!"

Rush replied, as well as he could with his mouth full of the delicious little sharp-cornered nuts, that she needn't think the squirrel family would starve, because he happened to know that they had all been caught and served up in a pie at the Johnsons', last Sunday.



MRS. PRIMKINS "CAN'T ABIDE CATS."—PAGE 63.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACCIDENT IN THE FAMILY.

Now I must tell you about the kittens, for they have a history.

To begin with, Mrs. Primkins lifted her hands in horror the moment she saw them.

“Lands! what next! Now you children needn’t bring any cats here! I can’t abide cats.”

“They won’t trouble you any,” Nimpo hastened to say, “for we’ll keep them up-stairs and take care of them. And they’re not cats,—they’re only kittens.”

“Well, mind I don’t see them down here,” said the neat housekeeper. “I guess your ma won’t let you keep them, anyway.”

“I guess she will!” Rush broke in, indignant-ly. “She lets us have as many as we like. I had six, once,—big cats!”

"Well, then, she ain't much like me!" said Mrs. Primkins, as they started up-stairs.

"No; I'm happy to say she isn't," said Nimpo, feelingly, after the door was shut.

The kittens made a difference in their bleak little rooms, somehow. Nimpo did not cry so often as before. They were so cunning, so playful, and so affectionate.

They had their soft little bed in a snug box in a corner of the room, though I'm sure they never slept in it, for they went to bed with the children every night.

Nimpo's kitten was black and white, and was named "Squitzimaning." This was an original name, you see, and cost many hours of thought and study. Rush's was a fine gray, and was called "Minzeyboo,"—another original name.

These high-sounding names, however, were only for grand occasions; they were shortened into Squitz and Minzey for every-day use.

They soon got used to their new quarters, and never thought of going down-stairs.

They played in the bedrooms, and in the at-

tic proper, which was between their rooms and Augusta's.

They were great pets with Robbie, who called them "Mupp Kitty," because they were soft and furry, and looked like mamma's muff, which he was very fond of.

"Kitty got mupp boots on," he said to Nimpo, the first time he saw their little soft feet. He played with them for hours while Nimpo and Rush were away at school.

Then they were wonderful kittens in other respects, as well as in their names; and their training and education were more wonderful still.

Before the kittens had been in their attic home a week, one of them met with a dreadful accident. One day, after school, Nimpo rushed up-stairs, as usual, to see them. There was Minzeyboo fast asleep on the bed. She waked up, stretched out, yawned, and curled up her droll little red tongue, and then she was ready for a frolic.

But Squitz was nowhere to be seen. Nimpo hunted under beds, behind trunks and boxes, and everywhere, but could not find her. Just

as she was about to go down-stairs to see if she had strayed away, she thought she heard a faint, far-off mew.

Once more she searched everywhere; but no kitty. Then she heard the mew again, and this time she listened attentively. It came from the side of the attic, and to Nimpo's horror, down between the walls.

You young folks who have played in attics know about these treacherous holes between the beams of the house, where the floor stops, and in which you have lost balls and tops and other treasures. They seem to be left there just for traps to catch things.

Well; poor Squitzimaning, in playing around, had gone too near one of those dreadful holes, and there she was, away down at the bottom of it, on a level with the floor of the chambers below, probably hurt by her fall, and perhaps half-starved.

How to get her out, was the first question. By this time Rush had come, and both were in the deepest distress.

"Of course we'll have to break a hole in the

wall, down-stairs," said Nimpo; and down they went to get the axe.

"What do you want with the axe?" asked Mrs. Primkins, as Rush went through the kitchen, dragging that useful tool.

"I was just coming to speak to you about it," said Nimpo, who now appeared. "Our kitty has fallen in between the walls, and we want to break a little hole, and get her out."

Nimpo spoke eagerly, but her heart died within her as she saw the look of indignation in Mrs. Primkins' face.

"Break a hole in my wall for a paltry cat! I guess so, indeed! Rush, you just take that axe back to the wood-shed, and be spry about it, and don't you *dare* to touch my wall. Pretty doings, I declare!" she went on, in her wrath.

"What shall we do to get her out?" asked Nimpo, ready to cry. "She's so hungry, and I'm afraid she's hurt."

"Let her die," said Mrs. Primkins, savagely. "She'll be dead by morning, and I'll throw some lime down to cover her up."

Nimpo turned away, too indignant to speak, lest she should say something awful, but on the way up-stairs she said to herself:

"The old hateful thing! just as if her old wall is any thing to a poor kitty. I wonder how she'd like to be left in a hole to die! I just wish she was there this very minute. I'd like to say, 'Never mind, Mrs. Primkins; we don't want to break the wall. You'll die to-night, and to-morrow I'll cover you up,'—ugh!"

Words failed her; besides, she had to set her wits to work to release poor Squitzimaning, who was still feebly mewling.

"Rush," she said, "you know how she claws things; I believe, if we can get something down to her, she'll hold on and let us draw her up."

"But what can we put down?" asked Rush.

"Let me see; it must be something easy to take a tight hold of,—something that will catch her claws. Oh dear! I can't think. I wish I was home; there are lots of things there."

"I'll tell you!" shouted Rush, "my tippet!"

"Yes, that's just the thing," said Nimpo; "but

that's at home; but wait,—I guess I've got my little knit scarf that grandma sent me. I brought it because I couldn't bear to leave it." And Nimpo rushed to her trunk, turned the things out in a pile on the floor, and near the bottom found the pretty blue and white scarf she was so fond of. She looked at it lovingly.

"I hate to spoil it; but I can't leave poor Squitz there."

The scarf was too short, of course, so they tied to one end of it a string, which Rush produced from his pocket. Then they tried to put it down, but it caught on every rough place, and would not go far.

"We must have something heavy on it to carry it down," said Nimpo. So they cut a hole in it, and slipped inside a hair-brush. This time it did not stick. Letting it out slowly and carefully, not to crush Squitz, Nimpo sent down the whole length of string. When the brush touched the bottom of the hole, she let it rest a minute, and began to draw up. Kitty was mewling all the time now; she seemed to know they were

trying to help her, and Nimpo kept talking to her.

"It seems heavier," said she; "I do believe she's on!" And just then they heard a mew so much nearer that they knew she was on. But while they were rejoicing, the little weight dropped off. Then came a sorrowful wail, and all was still.

"Oh, poor kitty! oh, poor kitty!" cried Nimpo, bursting into tears. "I'm afraid she's killed."

They listened again, and in a moment heard her mew once more. So they let down the scarf the second time, and brought the runaway safely to the top.

Nimpo seized her and covered her with kisses, then gave the poor little thing something to eat. This done, they never slept till they had found old newspapers, and stuffed up every hole in the attic.

"How did you get your cat out?" asked Mrs. Primkins, at the tea-table.

"I let down my scarf," answered Nimpo; "she caught hold of it, and I pulled her up."

"What! that pretty blue and white scarf of yours?" asked Augusta.

"Yes," said Nimpo, shortly, for she felt rather sore on the subject of that scarf. Nothing but love for poor Squitz would have induced her to spoil it.

"Wall, I declare!" said Mrs. Primkins, "I never in all my born days saw young ones so full of mischief! I don't see how your ma can live with you. To think of your spoiling that nice scarf!"

Nimpo's heart swelled.

"I don't think she feels it any great hardship," she said; while Rush blurted out roughly:

"She likes us better'n you do."

Mrs. Primkins smiled grimly, but she said:

"Wall, every body knows she was clear tuckered out with worry, and that's why your pa took her away—to get a rest from you. But that's nothing. Children don't care if they do worry their mother into her coffin, so's they have a good time."

This dreadful suggestion put a new thought into Nimpo's head. She sat there very quietly, but she was busy thinking.

"I suppose we are a trouble to mother," she

thought. "I wonder if we do get into mischief all the time, and I wonder if that's why she was so tired always. I remember father said, when she thought she couldn't go, 'Mary, you must go; you need the rest.' And I wrote her such a complaining letter," she thought, penitently. "I'm sure she'll worry if she thinks we're having a horrid time here. I'll write her another to-night."

Nimpo did not put even into thought a horrible possibility that made her shudder, suggested by Mrs. Primkins' remarks—the possibility of really losing her mother. But she wrote to her mother that night, telling her about the kittens, and the accident, heroically saying not one word about how unhappy she was at Mrs. Primkins'.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY.

THE long-expected Saturday came at last, and was a perfectly lovely day. In the morning Nimpo and Anna Morris walked out to Sarah's to get the new dress. It was all done, and was very neat, though it had not a ruffle or tuck on it. Sarah folded it nicely, and pinned it up in a newspaper, and Nimpo took it up to go.

"Nimpo," Sarah called after her, "come over some day and tell me 'bout the party, 'n I'll done tell ye a story make y'r har stan' up."

"Oh well, I will," said Nimpo.

"May I come too?" asked Anna eagerly, for the promise of a story was a great temptation to girls who did not have so many story books as you do.

"Yes, for all I care," said Sarah.

"We'll be sure to come," said both the girls, as they started off through the woods.

"Nimpo," said Anna, when they had nearly reached home, "why didn't you come over to our house last night after school, as you said you would?"

"I had a headache," replied Nimpo. "I've had a headache every damp day since I've been at Mrs. Primkins'. I'm sure I don't know why."

"Why Nimpo Rievor!" exclaimed Anna, lifting up her hands in horror. "What made you say that?"

"Because it's true, and I'll say it as often as I please, Miss Anna Morris."

Now Anna and Nimpo were either fast friends, or active enemies, all of the time. They were both impulsive and hasty, and they often "got mad" at each other, and were cool for days, not speaking, and making themselves as miserable as two quick-tempered girls can well be. Perhaps you've seen girls act so yourself.

"Well, I'm sure my mother will not let me

associate with you, if you talk like that," said Anna.

"Then you needn't," said Nimpo quickly. "I can find enough who will, as good as you are!"

It was extremely foolish (wasn't it now?). If they had only stopped a moment to explain, they would have found out that it was all a mistake. But they turned apart. Anna went home, and Nimpo stalked gloomily off, very unhappy indeed, for Anna's friendship and sympathy had been her greatest comfort in her trials at Mrs. Primkins'.

As soon as Anna reached home, she went to her mother. "Mother," said she, "Nimpo Rievor *swears!*"

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Morris, looking up.

"Nimpo said a swear word to me to-day," Anna replied.

"What did she say?" asked Mrs. Morris.

Anna repeated what she had understood Nimpo to say, and her mother was much shocked.

"Don't say it again, Anna," said she severely, "even to whisper it. And I forbid you to play

with her any more. I am afraid she is getting into bad ways since her mother went away. It ain't good for young people to be left to their own devices."

Having uttered this sentiment, Mrs. Morris proceeded with her work, and Anna went up-stairs to get ready for the party.

This party would seem a droll affair to you girls of nowadays. The invited guests came at the sensible hour of two o'clock in the afternoon, so as to have a good long time to play. There was no dancing; that being considered if not wicked, at least very frivolous. On the contrary, the girls sat around the room like so many sticks, for they all put on their stiff manners with their best dresses. After awhile Helen's mother came in, and suggested that they should go out in the yard and play something. In a few moments they were eagerly discussing what they should play.

"Let's play 'Pom, Pom, peel away!'" cried Nimpo, who delighted in lively games.

"Oh no!" said Anna, who did not speak to

Nimpo, "we play that every day at school. Let's play 'Crack the whip,' and Helen shall be leader!"

"Blind-man's-buff!" suggested another, and after some talk, "Blind-man's-buff" was decided upon.

"Who'll be it?" asked Helen. Thereupon Anna—who seemed to put herself forward to make her slight of Nimpo more conspicuous, began to count them off thus:

"Irey, Urey, Ickory, Ann,
Philisy, Pholisy, Nicholas, John.
Quevor, Quavor,
English Navor,
Stringalum, Strangalum, John, Buck."

The last words fell to Helen, who had to blind, then the play began.

But something was the matter with Nimpo, for she went and sat on the steps, and did not join in the game. She did not know herself what was the matter, but every body acted strangely. Not only did Anna look the other way when she came near, and flatly turn her back on her, but some-

thing seemed the matter with all the girls. Few of them spoke to her at all, and if they did, it was with a solemn face, and constrained manner, that Nimpo could not understand.

"I should think I'd been doing something awful," she said to herself. "I'll bet Anna Morris has been telling them some story. I don't care. I guess I can stand it if they can," she added defiantly, though her lip quivered a little, and she at once went on, "I won't play with them anyway."

So she slipped quietly into the house, and into the now empty parlor, where she had noticed a book-case. Nimpo was fond of lively games, as I said, but she was just as fond of a story-book, and to open that book-case, and eagerly look over its contents, was almost as much pleasure as to play.

The case was full, except the upper shelf where newspapers, inkstands, and such things were put. But they were not very attractive to a story lover. On the first shelf were "Brown's Concordance," and "Scott's Family Bible," in I don't know how

many brown volumes. Then came somebody's sermons, the "Life of Summerfield," and "Graham's Lectures."

She looked at the next shelf, there stood "Barnes' Notes," "Watts on the Mind," "The House I Live In" (which she peeped into and found it full of skeletons and such things), "Doddridge's Rise and Progress." But in a corner of the last shelf, almost hidden, she found a little black covered book, the name of which she could not read on the back. She took it down, opened its yellow leaves, and read the title—

RASSELAS.

How it found its way into that library, she knew not, nor cared; what she did care for was a good quiet place in a window at the farther end of the hall, behind a long curtain, and there she curled up on the wide sill, and devoured the fine old print, revelling in the Happy Valley, forgetting her troubles, the party, the games, every thing, in fact. At last she was aroused by the

noise of the whole party coming into the house, and Helen's voice asking,

"Where's Nimpo!—I thought she was in here!"

"I guess she's ashamed, and gone home," said Anna.

Then Nimpo burst out.

"I don't know why I should be ashamed, Anna Morris. I think you're the one to be ashamed," and then turning to Mrs. Benson, who was an amazed witness of this outbreak, she added,

"I've been reading in here, Mrs. Benson. Do you care?"

"Why no! I don't care,—bless your heart!—" said Mrs. Benson, "but girls usually prefer to play."

"Something's the matter to-day," said Nimpo, with a choked feeling in her throat.

"What is it, my dear?" asked Mrs. Benson kindly.

"I'm sure I don't know," said poor Nimpo. "I suppose Anna has told the girls some story, for she's mad at me."

"What is it, Anna?" asked Mrs. Benson.

"I don't like to tell," said Anna primly, "but my mother told me not to play with her, this very day."

"I don't believe it," said Nimpo.

"Well she did, anyway."

"But what did you tell your mother?" asked Mrs. Benson, who had been a girl herself, and knew how to make allowances.

"I told her that Nimpo said a bad word," said Anna, in an awed whisper.

"Oh, I didn't!" shouted Nimpo, angrily, "never in my life, Mrs. Benson."

Mrs. Benson calmed her, and then made Anna tell her story, when of course, Nimpo had only to correct the mistake, and all was over. The girls crowded around her, and Anna begged her pardon, which was as easy to her, as to "get mad." But Nimpo could only say, "Oh Anna! how could you! I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

They soon went out to tea, which was a sensible meal of biscuit and butter, cold tongue, fruit and cakes; and they all went home before seven o'clock.

“Oh dear!” sighed Nimpo, as she walked home alone, for she was too much hurt by Anna’s conduct to quite forgive her yet, “every thing goes wrong since mother went. I never had so much trouble in my life.”

CHAPTER IX.

SARAH'S STORY.

Nimpo did not forget Sarah's promise of a story, I can tell you, for her stories were wonderful things. To be sure, they were apt to be a little of the startling order, and generally ended with scaring her listeners half out of their wits, but that only made them more delightfully exciting.

Nimpo and Rush had spent many an evening in the kitchen at home, listening to her story-telling.

So a few days after the party, Rush, with Nimpo and Anna (who were good friends again), started off through the woods for Mrs. Johnson's.

After telling about the party, except the trouble with Anna, which she could not tell before her, they claimed the promised reward.

The Johnson children getting a hint of the

treat, began to crowd around, and Sarah began:

"Now, all you young uns must sit 'mazin' still if I'm gwine to tell a story."

Nimpo and Anna were already occupying the only spare chairs. Rush sat on the wood-box, and the biggest Johnson girl on a keg, while the rest of the children squatted around on the floor, making a close semicircle about Sarah.

Sarah's virtue as a story-teller was in her face and manner. She was very black, with large rolling eyes, a very long face, a monstrous mouth, great white teeth, and long thin hands, which had an uncanny white look on the inside, as though the color were coming off.

Perhaps you don't think hands have much to do with story-telling, but they had with Sarah's, I can tell you.

Quieting her audience with threats of "claring 'em all out the house," she began in a low, solemn voice:

"Onct upon a time, way down in Ole Kentuck', there lived a MAN! He was a-w-f-u-l rich, and had heaps an' heaps o' nice things in his dark

cellar. Bottles an' bottles o' wine, bar'ls an' bar'ls o' cider, an' lots an' lots o' hams, bar'ls an' bar'ls o' bacon, an' bins an' bins o' apples, an' jars an' jars o' sweetmeats, an' boxes an' boxes o' raisins, an' O! piles o' good things to eat, in that dark cellar."

Sarah paused to see the effect. Rush smacked his lips, and the eyes of the whole Johnson family rolled in ecstasy at the delightful picture.

"But he was a-w-f-u-l stingy! Not a speck of all these yer goodies would he guv to a-n-y body. Lor'! he al'us kep' the key in his own pocket, an' if he wanted ham for dinner, he went down in that yer d-a-r-k cellar, an' cut a slice, nuff fur hisself. An' if he wanted wine, he jes went down an' fotched a bottle, an' al'us locked the do' arter him, an' n-e-v-e-r guv Sam the fustest speck!"

"Who's dat ar?" asked one of the children.

"You shet up! I'll crack ye over the head, if ye don't stop cuttin' up sich shines!" Sarah replied.

The interrupter shrunk behind his mother, and felt snubbed.

"Well, now," Sarah went on, rolling her eyes, "that ar Sam was a po' nigga,—the only nigga the stingy man had; an' he was that stingy he never half fed him no way. He guv him a little corn-meal fur hoe cakes, an' onct in a g-r-e-a-t while a leetle teeny bit uv a thin slice o' bacon. So Sam got thinner an' thinner, till he was near a shadder, an' his fingers were l-o-n-g and b-o-n-y."

And Sarah held up hers and clawed them in the air, till the children could almost see Sam and his bony hands.

"Well, one day this bad man had to go 'way off to the big city, an' he hadn't got nobody to leave in the house but jes Sam. So he done measured out jes so much corn-meal, an' he said: 'Now, Sam, I shall be gone away three days, an' that'll have to last ye till I get back. I'll warrant ye'd like to jes eat it 'every scrap the fust day, an' ax fur mo',—it's jes like ye,—but not a scrap do you get till I come back, fur I've locked every thing up. An' if I find any thing out o' order when

I come back, I'll,—I'll,—wallop you; see if I don't!!!'

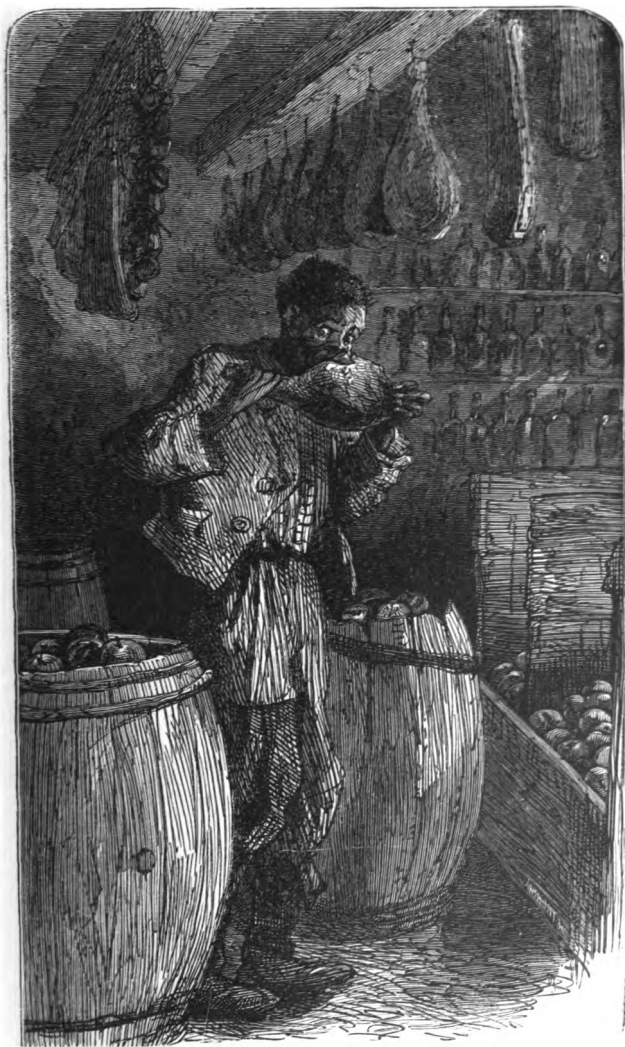
"With that ar d-r-e-f-f-u-l threat, the cruel mah'sr went off, an' left Sam all alone. Well, Sam went to clarin' up the house, an' when he went to hang up his mah'sr's every-day cloze,—fur in course he wore his Sunday ones to go to town,—he hars somethin' hit agin the wall, an' he thought to hisself: 'I'll see what that ar is. Mebby mah'sr's done leff a penny in his pocket. Oh, golly! won't I buy a bun!' An' he put his hand in the pocket, an' *what do you s'pose he found?*

"THE CELLAR KEY!!!"

Sarah, looking wildly at her listeners, said these thrilling words in an awful whisper, with a roll of the eyes and a dropping of the jaw, that made it still more horrible.

"'Oh, Lor'! here's the key!' said Sam to hisself; 'what s-h-a-l-l I do?' An' then he thought awhile. But, sakes! chillen, 'pears like the Debil

is al'us waitin' fur chances, an' so he popped into Sam's head to jes go an' *look* at the good things. 'I won't touch ary bit,' said Sam, 'fur ole mah's'r'd find out if one apple stem's gone,—but I'll look.' That was the fust wrong step, chillen. Ye know how hard it is to defrain, if ye look at the things ye oughten'ter. Well, this yer onreverent nigga c-r-e-p-t down-stairs an' unlocked the do', an' p-e-e-p-e-d in,—trem'lin', fit to drop. He mossepected to see ole mah'sr behind a bar'l. But it was as s-t-i-l-l as the grave, so he c-r-e-p-t in. There hung the l-o-n-g rows o' hams,—so juicy an' sweet; and Sam went up an' thought to hisself, 'Now, I'll jes smell of one.' So he smelled of it, an' it was so nice seems like he couldn't help jes touch it with his finger an' clap his finger in his mouf, an' then he did it agin. Ye know, chillen, how the ole Debil stan's side o' ye-an' helps ye on. Arter Sam had tasted onct or twice, he seen a t-e-e-n-y bit of a ham, way off in the fur corner, an' he said to hisself, 'I don't b'lieve ole mah'sr'll ever miss that ar one,—'taint much 'count no way.' An', chillen, he was that hungry he couldn't help



SAM IN THE CELLAR.—PAGE 88.

it, I do b'lieve. He snatched that hām, an' he eat an' eat an' eat till he couldn't stuff another moufful, an' hid the rest behind a bar'l. Then he went on an' went on till he come to the apples,—bins an' bins o' b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l red apples! And he smelt of 'em, an' then he eat an' eat an' eat till he couldn't stuff another moufful. Then he went on an' went on till he came to the shelf o' sweet-meats, an' he looked at 'em an' smelt of 'em, and finally he snatched a jar, tore off the cover, an' eat an' eat an' eat till he couldn't stuff another moufful.

“An' then he couldn't eat any more, sure nuff, an' he went out an' locked the do'. But he never had so much to eat in his life, an' 'pears like he was stuffed so full he sort o' lost his reasons. He went out an' laid down on a bench in the sun, an' he said to hisself, 'Lor'! ain't it nice to have nuff to eat fur onct; there's poor Jim, I don't s'pose he ever had nuff in his life.' An' then a v-e-r-y wicked idea come into his head. So, by'm by he got up an' went over to Jim's,—he lived next do',—an' he tole him soon's it was night to come

over, an' he tole him to fotch Sally. Sally was the house gal, a likely wench, an' Sam liked her. An' then he went to Tom's and tole him to come too; and finally, chillen, he 'vited quite a 'spectable company. Then he went home, an' he went into the wood-shed an' fatched in big sticks o' wood, an' he made up a mose won'erful fire, an' swept out the big kitchen clean an' nice, tho' he wasn't extra neat now, Sam wasn't. 'Bout ten o'clock his company 'gan to come, the ladies all dressed up fine in some of their missis' things,—low neck an' short sleeves, an' ribbins an' white gloves. O, go 'way! yer don't see no sich things up har! An' the gemmen! Lor', chillen, if ye could see the fine long-tailed blue coats, with buttons shinin' like marygolds, ye'd laff fit to split y'r sides.

“Arter the company was all there, an' talked a little 'bout the weather an' sich topics o' conversation, he axed 'em, ‘Wouldn't they like a little de-freshment?’ They was very polite, an' said, ‘No, thank ye,’ an' ‘I'd ruther be 'xcused.’ But he went to the cellar, an' he took'd out g-r-e-a-t plates

o' apples an' g-r-e-a-t pitchers o' cider, an' Tom helped him; an' they fotched out ole mah'sr's tum'lers, an' he filled 'em all up; an' he fotched out a w-h-o-l-e jar o' sweetmeats, an' a g-r-e-a-t dish o' honey, an' pickles,—oh, Lor'! such heaps o' things! An' all the time Sam said, so polite, 'Ladies an' gemmen, he'p you'self, there's mo' in mah'sr's cellar!'

"An' they did he'p theirselves, an' they eat an' eat an' eat till they couldn't stuff another moufful. An' while they was all stuffin', an' Sam was gwine round with a bottle o' wine in each hand, sayin' so polite, 'Ladies and gemmen, he'p you'self, there's mo' in mah'sr's cellar,' he happened to look up!

"THERE WAS HIS MAH'SR!!!"

As Sarah said this she gave a horrible yell, and sprang forward, clutching in the air, as though to seize them; and her spell-bound listeners screamed, and some of them fell over backwards.

Delighted with the effect of her tragedy, she

waited till they gathered themselves up, with awe-struck faces, to listen to the end.

She lowered her voice to a ghostly whisper.

"The mah'sr sprang to get Sam, but Sam let out a screech nuff to raise the dead, an' clared out thro' the do' 's tho' the Debil was arter him. The rest of the company slunk out 'thout axin' to be 'xcused, an' was in bed every soul of 'em in two minutes, an' snorin' fit to raise the roof. Sam's mah'sr run till he got done tired out, an' then he dragged hisself home."

Sarah stopped. After waiting a few minutes, Rush asked, in a scared sort of a voice, what became of Sam."

Sarah rolled her eyes, shook her head, dropped her jaw, and said, slowly:

"He n-e-v-e-r was heard of agin."

"Run away?" suggested Rush.

"S'pose so. Mebby up Norf this very day, f'r all I know." And Sarah turned to her work.

Her audience drew long breaths, and tried to resume their usual feelings, as though it were a common day.

But Sarah's stories invariably lasted longer than other people's. They seemed to do away with common every-day life, and the children couldn't get over them.

But they were all the more delightful for that; and Nimpo, Anna, and Rush took their leave at once, and walked home very quickly through the woods, which were now rather dusky, looking around nervously at every sound, half expecting to see the bony, half-starved Sam, or his fierce master.

But they were not afraid! Of course not,—they laughed at the idea of such a thing,—only Sarah's stories always seemed so real.

CHAPTER X.

THE BATTERING-RAM CLUB.

THE idea of a battering-ram came from a picture in the big Bible. That was the only picture-book Rush was allowed to look at on Sunday, at Mrs. Primkins', and while poring over its curious, old-fashioned prints one day, a bright idea popped into his head, and before night he had planned the whole. The first thing in the morning he started out for Johnny Stevens.

"Johnny," he began as soon as he found him, "I'm going to make a battering-ram."

"A *what*?" exclaimed Johnny.

"A battering-ram. I saw a picture of one in the big Bible yesterday. I know where there's some old bed-slats, and I know just how I can make it."

"But what do you want it for?" asked Johnny, who did not understand.

"Oh, it's splendid to play with—to knock things, you know; and I'll have Johnny Barston in it and some other boys," he went on enthusiastically, "and we'll have trainer caps and things, and I'll be the captain of it."

"What'll I be?" asked Johnny, dazzled by this gorgeous picture.

"Oh, you'll be first rammer," said Rush; "come on up to our house, we'll make it up in our play room in the barn."

When they reached the barn, they at once hurried up the ladder, and behind some boards they found the bed-slats.

"Let's see," said Rush, pulling them over, "I want the thickest one for the ram. That's the thickest," he went on, laying one down on the floor, "and these three'll do for arms." And he laid them across the first one, about a foot apart, thus leaving about two feet of the ram without arms.

"There!" said he, "when I get these arms fixed

on, you see the boys'll take hold of them and run lickity-split, and knock things with that end,—Bang!”

“Oh, yes!” said Johnny.

“Now I want the bit and brace.” And a vigorous search was at once instituted for that useful tool. Rush was not discouraged, because he was used to looking up his tools, since he generally dropped them when he was done with them just wherever he happened to be, and there they lay till he wanted them again.

This happened ever so long ago, you know. I don't suppose boys nowadays have such a foolish habit.

When the tools were found, and Rush had bored six holes—one through the middle of each arm and three through the main piece—and when he had sharpened up his “Barlow” knife, and made pegs for the holes, it was evening. After tea the boys retired to their homes, and made seven three-cornered hats out of old newspapers, which they called “trainer caps.”

The next morning the work of selecting re-

cruits began, and before noon five of the favorite boys of the neighborhood were formed into a club, bearing the formidable name of "Battering-Ram Avengers," with Rush as captain.

It was strictly a secret society, the oath of initiation being formally administered to each one separately by Rush taking him into the carriage-house, shutting the door, and making him say, "I won't *never* tell. True as I live and breathe and draw the breath of life."

The eager candidate agreed to this, and was then allowed to go up the ladder, and another boy admitted.

All the rest of the day, in the secrecy of the barn chamber, the new club practiced with the ram, learning to obey the words of command, being initiated into the mysteries of "Charge," "Retreat," "Right Wheel," and "Left Wheel," and a serious time they had with the last two, for none of them was very sure which was right and which left.

However, by night the captain thought they would do to make a sally. So when it was dark,

while their mothers thought they were playing an innocent game of "I spy," they assembled quietly at the barn, brought down the precious ram, took their places, and started out.

The first charge they made was at the gate, which a band of avengers could not be expected to condescend to open. The captain marched in front, with drawn sword (a wooden one that he had made himself). When he came to the gate he stepped one side, and said, in a voice of command,

"Rammers, charge!"

They charged. The latch gave way, and the band strode proudly out.

The next charge was at the gate of a boy who was always at enmity with the captain. First peering around to see that he did not lurk in some corner, the order was given, "Right wheel, charge!"

The position of the gate helped their tardy knowledge of right and left. They obeyed, and the latch holding better than the first, the hinges gave way, and the gate fell with a crash.

The club forgot their dignity and took to their heels. Around the next corner, however, they rallied, and, finding they were not pursued, they felt their courage rise with the success. On they went, around the village, charging against gates, and fences, and wood-sheds. After doing considerable mischief, sometimes to the fence, and sometimes to themselves when the instrument slipped between the boards and let them crash against the fence, the proud captain ordered them to charge against a tree.

It was to be the last charge, and they went at it with spirit, going back some feet and advancing on a run. The ram hit the tree with such force that every boy pitched forward, and every peg that held the arms snapped off. There was a crash, a general tumble, a few smothered cries, two or three bloody noses, and one or two smashed hats. But the battered club picked itself up, carried home the fragments, and went off to bed.

The next day damages were repaired, and the next night the club was out again as good as new.

This went on for a week, the boys' parents never suspecting them, and the village in a ferment to discover the cause of broken gates, boards off of fences, school-house doors broken in, barrels upset, etc., etc. At last a watch was set, and threats were heard—not loud, but deep—of vengeance on the culprits when found.

And they were caught, not by any of the parties of big boys who lay in wait behind fences and big trees, nor by the fierce dogs which were let loose in yards, nor yet in the trap which old Mr. Steele set by his front gate, but by Nelly Benson, who was sitting on the steps of the house. Hearing them coming up the walk, she listened, suspected from their whispers that some mischief was brewing, and just quietly walked up to them.

She seized the brave captain. He never thought of resisting, but went with her, two or three of the club following, while the rest ran away. Nelly was alone in the house, and the boys owned up to the whole performance, and she promised not to tell if they would agree to break up the club.

The valiant band promised, and sadly took their way home.

"What shall we do with the ram?" asked Johnny Barston.

"Come over to our house in the morning, and we'll have a bonfire, and burn her up," said Rush. "Nobody else shall have her if we can't."

The next morning a party of seven assembled in the back end of the garden, brought out the mischievous ram, chopped it to pieces, built a fire of chips, piled on the ram, and stood and saw it burn. Just before the end Rush proceeded solemnly to the barn chamber, brought out a pile of torn and dusty hats, laid them sadly on the pile, and finished the tragedy with his precious wooden sword.

That act of heroic sacrifice awed the assembled club. They stood in silence and saw the painful labor of hours turn to ashes, and then—feeling like very good boys indeed, fully intending to stay at home evenings, mind their mothers, and never play marbles for keeps—they turned away.

"I'm glad that's done with," said Rush, with a

sigh of relief; "now we sha'n't have any more trouble about that."

"What shall we do next?" asked Johnny.

"Let's sit down on the steps and talk about it," said Rush.

So down they sat, and discussed in eager whispers various plans for "fun," till, their spirits rising with the talk, Rush suddenly burst out with:

"Let's have another Battering-Ram Club! What do you say?"

"Agreed! agreed!" shouted the boys. Only Johnny said:

"But we promised we wouldn't."

"No, we didn't!" said Rush, "we promised to break up the club, and burn up our things, and so we did. Besides we won't go out into the street any more, we'll set up a scarecrow, or something out in the lot, and we'll batter that in the daytime." Their scruples were slight, and so the new club was organized before the ashes of the old one were cold.

"Isn't it too bad I burnt up my sword?" said Rush, as he and Johnny started for Mrs. Primkins'.

CHAPTER XI.

RUSH'S CIRCUS.

THE next plan that Rush got up—for somehow the second battering-ram club never amounted to much, was a circus. For a week he and Johnny Stevens had been full of mystery. Secret consultations had taken place with Nimpo, suspicious bundles had been smuggled out of the house, and strange and unearthly sounds had been heard issuing from the barn chamber—not only of sawing and hammering, which might legitimately be supposed to be accessory to the night's preparations—but groans, screams, barks, and other unaccountable noises.

Rush had not only worked early and late in that mysterious room, with Johnny to watch the entrance, and shout the moment any one came

toward the barn, but he had emptied his tin savings-bank, made stolen visits to a friendly house-painter, confiscated every bit of rope about the yard, lost every pair of scissors in the house, and grown so important with his great secrets that an ordinary mortal could hardly live with him.

The great day at last arrived, and as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast Rush started for the house, to prepare for the "Grand Entree," which a circus always makes, shouting to Nimpo that the procession would go by in ten minutes.

Sure enough, almost as soon as Nimpo and Robbie reached the house, strange music was heard from the barn, and in a moment, there appeared the procession.

First came Rush, dressed in a suit of white, with stripes of red (flannel) down the sides of the pantaloons, sewed on with big white stitches. A red sash, also of flannel, was tied around his waist and held a formidable-looking wooden sword. Gay paper epaulets on his shoulders, and a "trainer cap" of newspaper, with a perfectly gorgeous paper tassel sticking out of the

point on top. He was marching proudly at the head, playing vigorously on a mouth-organ (if that's the name of it).

Next to him, and kept in the ranks by a string in his hand, came Lion, a good-natured sheep-dog, belonging to Johnny Stevens, decorated with a harness of red flannel over his shaggy black coat. He was doing duty for twenty or thirty pairs of horses in drawing a grand circus wagon.

This wagon was the darling of Rush's heart, and the result of nights of contriving and days of toil. It was made in imitation of a gorgeous circus chariot, and the two sides were intended to represent dragons. To be sure, they were not exactly like the pictures of that monster; but then you know dragons lived so long ago (before the days of naturalists) that one can't be positively sure of their shape. Rush had made a careful copy, as well as he could remember, of the dragons composing the body of a wagon which had passed through the town some time before. He had then drawn it on two thin boards, roughly sawed them out, and then painfully and labori-

ously cut them down to shape with his Barlow knife.

I don't know what sort of knives you boys of nowadays have, but in those times, when a boy became clamorous for a knife of his own, careful mothers provided him with what they called "a nice Barlow knife," and felt no fears of resulting cuts. The fact is, the Barlow knife was made in the interest of timid parents, and its great virtue was its harmlessness. It wasn't made to cut, and it couldn't be induced by any persuasion (or grindstone) to do any thing more than "hack."

Well, Johnny had patiently turned the grindstone for hours together to sharpen that knife, and Rush had hopefully worked away for days on his two dreadful dragons; and at last in some shape they were finished, nailed to the sides of his little wagon, and painted a fiery red, with terrific-looking white eyes.

Riding in the wagon and beating a drum (namely, an old tin pan), was little Harry Bean, who was one of the performers and on this occasion represented the band. Last, but not least,

came Johnny, carrying a banner, bearing some strange device, and playing as well as he could, on a dressing-comb, wrapped in paper.

The procession moved around the yard and garden several times, stopping now and then to announce to a boy who leaned over the fence to look at the display that the circus would begin at the barn at two o'clock that afternoon. Admittance, two pins.

At the stated hour quite a party collected in the exhibition room. It was a curious room, over the carriage-house. When the barn was full of hay this place was all filled; but as the hay lowered it got empty, and then it was swept out and taken possession of by the boys as their play-room, till it was filled again. On one side was a big door, to put the hay through, which answered for windows; and on the other was a great pile of hay, now down below the floor of the room.

The audience was limited to those who could climb—for the only entrance was by means of a ladder made of strips nailed across two of the

side-timbers of the barn—and it consisted of half a dozen small boys, Nimpo and Robbie, and Anna Morris.

The spectators were seated on a bench, made by putting a board across two pails, and two broken-backed chairs. Before the back corner of the room was hung a curtain, made of an old-fashioned patch-work quilt; and, owing to the difficulty of drawing it up, the actors came out from behind it to perform. The stage was divided from the audience room by a clothes-line stretched across.

Rush stood at the hole in the floor, which served instead of a door, and took the pins. When the last one had arrived, he stepped over the rope and retired behind the curtain; and the show began.

The first thing was a dance. Rush stationed himself on one side with his mouth-organ, and began to play. Then Johnny jumped out from behind the curtain, dressed in an old plaid suit, which was very tight and had the legs cut off in points very short, and the sleeves cut in the same way. There was a long stretch of white

leg between those abbreviated pantaloons and his shoes and stockings and a very thin, white arm above the black little hands.

This extraordinary costume was greeted with a great laugh by the audience, in which he joined so heartily that it was not till severely expostulated with by Rush, who threatened to break up the show, and by Nimpo who said she would go into the house, that he composed himself enough to proceed. Rush began the inspiring music again. Johnny threw himself around in a fantastic way, waving his arms, rolling his head about, and throwing his thin legs as high as he could, and altogether looking more like an escaped maniac than a circus performer. He ended with a grand finale of standing on his head, with his long legs stuck up like two poles, which was certainly a new feature in stage dancing. Having finished his performance, he turned a summerset, and disappeared behind the curtain, nearly jerking it down, too, by the way.

There was a few moments of energetic whispering behind the curtain, and then came out Rush

and Lion, while Johnny peeked out through a hole. Lion was a very knowing dog. He could play dead and speak when told to; and he would demurely hold a bit of bread on his nose till Rush counted three (if he counted fast), and then give it a toss and snap it up in a second. This brought down the house, and was repeated till every bit of bread was used.

In the next act Lion was announced to be a real wild lion; and Rush struck various attitudes with him, such as he had seen Herr Driesbach do. First he took him by the collar and stood with his legs very far apart, and an arm raised with a club, as though about to beat his brains out. He put on a look of such fierceness that Lion, though he had practiced for a week, was struck with terror to the bottom of his doggish heart, and he dropped his tail and crouched down in the most sheepish way. But, if the beast failed, there was no failure in Rush. He held his position till his legs ached, and then suddenly assumed another, while the audience murmured its delight.

After the attitudes came another performance

by Johnny—a speech. He came on to the stage with a sling, holding a small stone, and, standing near the edge of the room where the hay was, he began:

“Little David with a sling,
At great Goliath he did fling.”

Whereupon he slung his stone with great force toward an imaginary giant, away up above his head.

“Hit Goliath in the head.
Great Goliath fell down dead.”

At which his arm dropped and he fell over the edge on to the hay.

The effect was great, only marred by a subdued giggling that came from the hay. In another minute Johnny crept up the ladder and tip-toed across the room to the curtain, and the discreet audience pretended not to see him.

The next scene was ground and lofty tumbling on the part of Rush and little Harry Bean, who was airily attired in a pair of short white drawers

and his short-sleeved white shirt. Rush lay down on his back (to the serious detriment of his white clothes), stuck up one arm, and Harry carefully laid himself across his hand. After holding him there a few seconds, Rush put him down, and then held him the same way on his two feet. Then he got up, and, after arranging Harry in an undignified squat in the middle of the stage, he retired to the further end, swung his arms two or three times to get a start, counted "one to begin, two to show, three to make ready, and four to go," and, starting full force, ran and gave a flying leap over Harry's head. This was considered a masterpiece, and raised loud applause and cries of "Do it again!" Then Harry was dragged behind the curtain by Johnny, against his will; and Rush turned a handspring—and you know what that is.

The last act was a sham fight between Rush and Johnny. They came out from opposite sides of the curtain. When they saw each other, their eyes glared (though Johnny, as usual, smothered a giggle), and, shouting fiercely between shut

teeth the words "villain!" and "traitor-r-r!" they rushed together. The struggles were fierce, and resulted in several wholly unanimous tumbles, when the words "don't!" and "you hurt!" were heard in low but earnest tones, and the circus was announced as done. The audience climbed down the ladder and went home, and Rush (feeling that the circus had been a perfect success) told Johnny in confidence that he was going to get up a panorama.

CHAPTER XII.

NIMPO MAKES CAKE.

NIMPO had by this time become accustomed to the blue-edged dishes at Mrs. Primkins', but they lived much more plainly than her mother did, and she was now very tired of corned beef, and boiled potatoes, bread and milk and dried-apple sauce. Every day she was thinking how she should like this or that, and gradually a great idea took form in her head, namely, to go to the old house and bake some cake. To be sure, she had never made any cake, but there was her mother's receipt book, and she knew she could follow directions.

Rush was delighted with the plan. So, one morning, instead of going to school, they took Robbie and went down to the house.

Nimpo walked slowly, with Robbie, while Rush ran on ahead to the store to get the key.

"Now, Rush, you make a fire," said Nimpo, as soon as they were in the house, "while I hunt up the receipt book." So Robbie brought in chips, and Rush brought in wood, and Nimpo went upstairs to look for the book.

"What kind would you make?" she shouted down-stairs to Rush, who was blowing away at the fire.

"Oh, any kind, so it's good and rich," called Rush. "What kinds are there?"

Nimpo came down and began to read.

"Rich cakes,—of course, we want it rich; we have enough poor stuff at Mrs. Primkins'."

"Of course," assented Rush.

"'Old Hartford Election Cake.' That doesn't sound good, besides, it takes five pounds of flour, and brandy," said Nimpo, running her eye over the receipt.

"Read the next," said Rush.

"'Raised Loaf-Cake.' That takes one pound of flour,—let me see. 'Mrs. H.'s Raised Wedding Cake.' That takes yeast, and seven pounds of flour. 'Fruit Cake or Black Cake—'"

"Oh, make that!" interrupted Rush. "That's splendid; and we can have as much as we want. Mother never lets us have but a little bit of a piece."

"Well," said Nimpo, reading, "this takes '*one pound white sugar, three-quarters pound of butter, one pound flour, sifted.*' That sounds easy." She went on: "'*Twelve eggs, two pounds raisins, stoned;*' but I guess they'll do without. I don't care for the stones."

"Nor I," said Rush.

"'*Two pounds citron,*'—they've got that at the store,—'*quarter ounce of cinnamon, nutmegs and cloves,*'—we've got all those in the spice-box,—'*one wine-glass of wine, and one of brandy,*'—we haven't got those, and, you know, Cousin Will won't give us any."

"Won't cider do?" asked Rush. "He'll give me some, maybe."

"I guess so. Well, I'll make that. Let me see what I want. You must go down to the store and get—a dozen eggs,—we've got raisins in the store-room,—cider and butter and citron. If Cous-

in Will asks you what you want it for, tell him I'm making cake."

"Well," said Rush, "eggs, cider, butter, and citron. Robbie, do you want to go, too?"

Robbie did. So they went off, and Nimpo proceeded to collect her materials.

First she brought out the scales and the earthen dish that her mother made cake in. Next she weighed the flour and the raisins. Then she brought out the spice-box, but she couldn't weigh a quarter of an ounce, so she had to guess at that.

As soon as Rush came in with the things, she began to mix them, carefully following the book.

"Rub the butter and sugar together," she read. So she weighed the butter and sugar, put them in the dish, and took the wooden spoon her mother used for cake. They wouldn't mix very well. She couldn't make it look like her mother's cake. But after working till her arms ached, she thought it would "do," so she proceeded to put in the rest.

"Eggs come next. I must break them and separate the whites and yolks." So she took up one and broke it. She broke it too much, in fact, for the yolk ran out, and she couldn't separate it from the white.

"I don't care," she said. "I don't believe it'll make any difference, anyway; they all go in just the same."

So, feeling sure that she had exploded at least one humbug in cake-making, she broke all the eggs into a dish, and began beating them. Soon her shoulder began to ache; then she declared she "didn't believe it mattered if it wouldn't stand up as mother made it,"—and in went the eggs with the butter and sugar.

"Then add part of the flour," said the receipt. So she put in a few handfuls.

"'The spice, the whites of the eggs,'—those are in already," said Nimpo,—"'the remainder of the flour, and the wine and brandy.'"

Nimpo threw in the rest of the flour, and a tumblerful of cider,—she had no wine-glass,—and stirred all up together.

"The book says, 'first pour in the pans, and then add the raisins and citron and currants.' Oh, I forgot the currants," said Nimpo; "I guess I won't put them in."

"Oh, yes, do!" said Rush. "I'll get them."

"Well, they're in a glass jar on the second shelf in the store-room," said she, "and be careful you don't let it fall."

Rush soon had the jar.

"How many do you want?" he asked.

"Two pounds," said Nimpo; "And—oh! they've got to be 'carefully cleaned.'"

"How do they clean 'em? Do you know?"

"Yes; I've seen Sarah—wash them."

So Rush weighed out the currants, and put them into a pan to wash,—eating all the time,—while Nimpo sliced the citron,—eating, too,—and got the two square cake-pans to bake it in.

"The book says, 'line the pan with paper,' but I sha'n't do that; I don't see any use in it. Rush, don't eat up all those currants!"

"No, I won't," said Rush, beginning now to wash them.

In a few minutes he announced them all ready and brought the pan to Nimpo. It was half full of currants, covered with very dirty water.

"Oh dear! you must pour off the water," said Nimpo.

Rush took it over to the sink and began to pour out the water.

"Nimp, the currants go too!" he called.

Nimpo hurried over there, but a good many currants were swimming around in the sink. She snatched the pan and poured what was left into the cake-pan.

"I believe they dry them in a cloth, but I haven't time, and besides I haven't any cloth, and I don't see any difference anyway," she said, as she stirred them in.

They were very wet, and they made the cake look odd and sticky. But Nimpo was getting tired now, so she poured it into the two pans and hurried it into the oven.

"Get some more wood, Rush," she said.

"Give me the pan to scrape," cried Rush.

"I'll give you part, and Robbie must have part,"

she answered. "But, Rush," she cried, excitedly, "that cake must bake four hours!"

"Oh, my! What for?" asked Rush.

"I don't know. The book says so; but I know mother don't bake cake so long as that. I don't believe the old book is right."

"Nor I," said Rush. "We can tell when it's done; can't we?"

"I guess I can," said Nimpo. "Now, let's make up a good fire to bake it, and go out and get cool; it's dreadfully hot in here."

Out they went, swung on the big swing, played in the barn, and after awhile they thought of the cake.

"Oh I wonder if the cake is done!" said Nimpo, and they went in to see.

If the cake wasn't done, the fire was. So they made up another fire, and looked at the cake. It looked brown enough outside, but when Nimpo ran a broom splint into it—as she had seen her mother do—she saw that something was wrong.

"No, it isn't done inside," said she, "though I'm sure it is outside."

Well, they went off to play again; and the next time they went into the house they concluded that the cake was done. It didn't stick much to the broom splint, and certainly the outside was a great deal too brown.

Nimpo took the loaves out, and in trying to shake them free from the pans, one of them broke in two.

"Never mind, we can eat this one now," said Nimpo, "and keep the other to take back with us."

It didn't look exactly like mother's black cake, nor did it taste quite right. But then it was very rich, Nimpo said, "and, anyway, it was good."

So they ate as much as they liked, though Robbie, wise little fellow, would take but one taste.

They interspersed the entertainment with raisins and currants that they had left on the table.

All this had taken some hours, and now it was time to go back to Mrs. Primkins'.

"What shall we do with the dishes?" asked Rush.

"Oh, we'll leave them to-night. I'm too tired

to wash dishes; besides, I hate it. Sarah'll wash them when she comes."

So, after brushing the flour from their clothes as best they could, they carefully wrapped their precious cake in a napkin, and returned to Mrs. Primkins', Nimpo stealing softly up-stairs with the cake under her apron.

She reached the room safely, and locked the delicious loaf in her trunk, ready for another feast.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUSH MAKES HIS WILL.

NEITHER of the children wanted any tea, and Mrs. Primkins was not particularly surprised, for they had a way of going to the store and eating so much trash that they didn't care for bread and milk.

They played with the kittens awhile, and then went to bed.

About eleven o'clock, when every thing had long been still in the house, Nimpo was wakened from a horrid dream by hearing Rush call her. She got up and went to his door.

"What do you want, Rush?" she asked in a whisper.

"Oh, come in here," he cried. "I'm awful sick, Nimpo. I know I'm going to die. Oh, dear! oh,

dear! can't you do something for me?" And he doubled up and groaned and cried again.

"Where is the pain?" asked Nimpo, half scared out of her wits, as she added, desperately, "I don't know what to give you, and I haven't got any thing if I did."

Here Rush groaned and cried afresh, and Nimpo sat down on the foot of the bed, and cried with him.

She was afraid to go after the doctor, and neither of them for a moment thought of going to Mrs. Primkins. They regarded her only in the light of an enemy, and that she could have common sympathy with their sufferings never occurred to the two miserable children.

Between the attacks of pain, Rush was perfectly easy, and I suspect he rather enjoyed—in his easy times—being the hero of the hour, though in a mournful sort of a way.

"Nimpo," he said at last, "I want to give away my things before I die. What would you give to mother?"

"I don't know," said Nimpo, solemnly.

"Oh, I know; I'll give her my pretty box, that I got last Christmas; I know she'll like it. And Robbie can have my sled,—you know how he used to like it."

"Yes," sobbed Nimpo. Just then the pain came on again, and poor Rush writhed and twisted and groaned till it was over.

"You may have my books, Nimpo," he moaned, when he felt better again, "and, oh! I wish you'd give my bow and arrows to Johnny Stevens—he always wanted a bow; they're in the shed. And—and—my knife——"

But his knife was too precious to part with, even on his death-bed, so he added:

"Well, I won't give away my knife yet."

After that, his sufferings engrossed him until, at last, he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Then Nimpo, with a throbbing head, crept off softly to her own bed, where she lay tossing, in a high fever, until daylight.

Perhaps they would never have known what was the matter that night, but for the repugnance they both felt for the remaining fruit-cake. Nim-

po took it out the next day, but Rush said it made him sick to look at it, and she couldn't touch a morsel herself. So she broke it into little bits and threw it out of the window; and I hope the birds knew enough to let it alone.

The next day Rush was not able to go to school, so he went down to the store and dozed on Cousin Will's bed, in the back room. For the present, however, he gave up all thought of dying, but spoke pathetically to Cousin Will of his narrow escape.

That young gentleman suspected what was the matter, and made a good deal of fun of him, and had a good laugh at Nimpo's cake.

"I guess mother was right, after all," said Nimpo. "She never would let us eat much of that rich cake."

That morning, also, Nimpo's conscience began to trouble her about the dishes she had left. So, after school, she took Robbie down to the house, and proceeded to "put the kitchen to rights," as she called it.

It was so warm she thought she wouldn't make

a fire, as she could just as well wash the dishes in cold water; but she found this no easy thing to do. She worked away patiently, but every thing was so tightly stuck on, that it was the work of some hours to get them clean. The worst of it was she grew very warm and tired, and spoke crossly to Robbie when he came in to ask some little help from her. At last after sweeping up the floor, and putting away the things as well as she could, under the circumstances, she went out to where Robbie sat on the steps, very much ashamed of her crossness.

"I wish my mamty'd come home," said he softly to himself.

"So do I, Robbie;" said Nimpo pleasantly. "Shall we send her a letter to come home?"

"Do, send it in a mitit."

"Well I will, soon's I get back to Mrs. Primkins'."

"You're the bestest girl I ever saw," said the affectionate little fellow.

"You're a little darling," said Nimpo, giving him a good hug.

"Don't screeze me! I ain't a darling—I'm a boy," said Robbie, his spirits returning.

Then he sprang up, and danced around the steps.

"I'm a prancy horse! Don't ixturb me!"

But Nimpo seized him, and kissed him two or three times.

"I haven't any kisses for you," he said, trying to wipe them off his lips, "they're all for my mamty when she comes home."

"Well, then I'll give you some," said Nimpo.

"Well," he said, holding up his lips innocently, to receive them.

CHAPTER XIV.

KEEPING HOUSE.

SINCE the day when Mrs. Primkins said that Mrs. Rievor was "clean tuckered out," Nimpo had taken care to write cheerful letters to her mother; but she was really very unhappy at her boarding-house.

She had no more violent outbursts, for she had a little better control of her temper. But in spite of her efforts to endure it quietly, she was so homesick that she began to think any thing would be better than staying there; so she proposed to Rush that they should go home and keep house by themselves.

To be sure, she had not forgotten the unlucky cake business; but she knew of one or two plain things that she could cook, and then they could live on crackers and raisins, and such things, from

the store, where you must know, they sold not only dry goods and crockery, but groceries, hardware, boots and shoes, and, in fact, nearly every thing needed in a house.

Rush, of course, was delighted with the plan. So, for several days, he and Nimpo, with Cousin Will's consent, helped themselves to crackers and cheese, and other things, and coaxed from the two clerks such delicacies as candy, raisins, nuts, and lemons.

Every thing they could get they carefully took to the house, without eating a bit, and so by Friday night they thought they had enough to begin housekeeping.

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, without saying a word to Mrs. Primkins, they all went down to the house to stay.

First they built a fire in the kitchen, not because they needed a fire, but somehow a fire in the kitchen seemed a necessary part of housekeeping.

Nimpo, feeling the housekeeping fever stirring within her, tied a veil on her head, and gave the

house a most energetic sweeping. By the time she had swept the dirt out on the back piazza, ready to take up (or sweep over the edge, more likely), she was quite tired.

So she ransacked the book-case, and found a book which she hadn't read since she went to Mrs. Primkins. It was "Thaddeus of Warsaw,"—a very delightful book, she thought as she threw herself on the lounge, and began to read.

Her housekeeping fever evaporated, and she read and read, letting the dust settle all over every thing in the rooms, and leaving the furniture in confusion.

Meanwhile, Robbie amused himself about the house, and Rush played in the yard with Johnny Stevens, who never knew how nearly he came to owning that coveted bow and arrows.

By and by, he came in.

"Nimpo, ain't we going to have dinner? Johnny's gone home to his."

"Well, I s'pose so," said Nimpo, reluctantly laying down her book, where the hero was in a desperate situation,—as book heroes al-

ways are, you know; and down-stairs they all went.

"Let's eat it right here," said Rush, going into the pantry where the precious stores were kept.

"Oh, no!" said Nimpo. "Let's set the table nice; it'll seem so much more like home."

"Well," said Rush, "where's the table-cloth? I'll help."

"In that drawer," said Nimpo, from the dining-room, where she was drawing out the table.

The dishes were soon on with three such active workers, for Robbie brought the knives and the napkins. But now a difficulty arose,—the forks and spoons were all locked up in the safe at the store.

"Never mind," said Rush; "we can use the kitchen ones. They're as good as Mrs. Primkins', any day."

"We can go without," said Nimpo, who couldn't bear to have any thing like Mrs. Primkins; "and besides, we don't need them."

It was a droll meal that they sat down to at

last, for Nimpo insisted on having every thing put on in style.

At the head of the table, by her plate, she had a pitcher of milk (brought from the next neighbor) and a dish of candy, also one of raisins. The candy was sticks, cut into small pieces,—“to look like more,” Nimpo said.

Before Rush was a large plate of crackers, and a glass of radishes—suspiciously large—out of the garden. Scattered about were plates of cheese, butter, dried beef, and so on, which finished this odd meal.

They ate a few crackers, as a matter of duty, and then attacked the candy and raisins.

After dinner, Nimpo hurriedly put on an apron and cleared up the kitchen, while Rush and Robbie played in the barn on the hay.

“Thaddeus of Warsaw” contented Nimpo for another hour, and then a thorough and exhaustive rummaging of boxes, drawers, and shelves, with the zest of a long absence, occupied her till tea-time.

That was rather a dull meal. The candy and

raisins being gone, it consisted of crackers and milk and dried beef.

By the time that the children went up into the parlor it began to be dark, and somehow a dreadful loneliness seemed to settle over the rooms. It was unpleasant to think that there was nobody in the house but themselves. Then Nimpo remembered that she had left all the windows open in her sweeping of the morning.

She asked the boys to go up with her to shut them. Not that she was afraid!—of course not—but it seemed more cheerful to keep together.

Accordingly, they all went up-stairs and closed the windows, and then they went down-stairs and did the same in the basement, locking every door.

"Where'll we sleep to-night?" asked Rush, when they were all back in the parlor again, with a light; "in our own rooms?"

"No," said Nimpo: "Robbie and I will sleep in mother's bed, and you can sleep on the lounge in the sitting-room."

"I think *I* might sleep with Robbie," in moth-

er's room. You're the oldest, and you ought to sleep on the lounge."

"No, I have to sleep with Robbie," said Nimpo, with dignity; "besides, you're a boy, and you ought to protect us."

What protection there was in sleeping on the lounge, Nimpo didn't say; but Rush accepted the compliment to his boyhood, and made no more objections to the arrangement.

As it grew later Robbie became very tired, and leaning on Nimpo's knee he begged her to tell him a story.

Nimpo took him into her lap.

"Well, what shall it be?" she asked.

"Tell me the story 'bout the Tiny Pigs," said Robbie, eagerly.

So Nimpo began.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STORY OF THE TINY PIGS.

"ONCE upon a time, there was a mamma pig, and she had three little tiny pigs. And it was hard work to get along, for they lived in the woods, and had nothing to eat except what they could get themselves. So the mamma pig told the tiny pigs that they must go away and make houses for themselves. So they all started off, and the oldest one went to the North, and n-e-v-e-r came back; and the middle one went off to the South, and n-e-v-e-r came back; but the little, tiny bit of a baby pig said, 'I will live by my mamma.'"

"So would I!" interrupted Robbie.

"Yes, so you would," said Nimpo. "Well, this little pig went off to where a man was making bricks, and he said, 'Man, will you please give

me some bricks to build me a house?'—for this tiny pig was very polite. Well, the man gave him some bricks, and the little pig built himself a nice, strong house.

He hadn't lived there very long, when there came along a great gray wolf. Now, the wolf was v-e-r-y hungry, and he wanted a little pig for his breakfast. So he knocked at the door.

'Who's there?' squeaked the tiny pig.

'It's I!' said the wolf, in a deep growly voice.

'What do you want?' said the tiny pig.

'I want to come in,' said the wolf.

'Well, you can't come in,' said the tiny pig; for his mother had taught him to be very careful, and never let any body into his house.

But the wolf was angry, so he roared out:

'Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll b-l-o-w your house down!'

'Huff away, puff away; you can't blow this house down,' said the tiny pig.

So he huffed and he puffed, and he puffed and he huffed, but he couldn't blow the house down, because it was made of bricks. But he was a sly

old wolf, and he wasn't discouraged a bit. He softened his roar to as gentle a growl as he could, and he said:

'Piggy, do you like turnips?'

'Oh, my! I guess I do!' said piggy.

'Well, Farmer Green has got a whole field of turnips, and I'll come over to-morrow morning, at six o'clock, and we'll go over and get some.'

'Well,' said piggy, 'all right.' And the wolf went home to his den.

The next morning, at six o'clock, he came again, and knocked at piggy's door.

'Who's there?' asked piggy.

'It's I!' answered the wolf, in his softest growl. 'I'm come to take you over to get the turnips.'

'Oh!' said the wise little piggy. 'I went over at five o'clock, and ate as many as I could stuff.'

Then the wolf gave a great growl; he couldn't help it, because he was hungry, you know. But, in a minute he thought of another plan.

'Piggy,' said he, 'do you like pears?'

'Oh, my! I guess I do!' said piggy.

'Well,' said the wolf, 'to-morrow, at five o'clock, I'll come and take you over to Farmer Brown's orchard, where there's a lovely tree of pears.'

'Well, all right,' said piggy.

Now, the piggy thought he'd be smart, so he went over at four o'clock; but others could be cunning as well as he, and he had hardly got to the orchard before he saw the gray wolf coming along. Piggy hurried to climb into a pear-tree, and when the wolf got there he was eating pears.

'Are they nice, piggy?' said the wolf, looking up wistfully,—not at the pears, but at the pig; for a wolf can't climb a tree, you know."

"No more can a piggy," said Robbie.

"No," answered Nimpo, "only in story-books."

'Oh, I guess they are!' said piggy. 'Shall I throw you one?'

'Yes,' said the wolf,—just to pretend, you know, for he couldn't bear pears.

So piggy threw down a pear, and the wolf ran and got it. And then he threw another, farther

off, and the wolf ran after it. And the next one he threw just as far as he could; and while the wolf was gone after it, piggy jumped down, sprang into an empty barrel that stood there, and began to roll down the hill.

When the wolf started to come back, he saw this barrel rolling down towards him, and he was awfully scared; and he turned and ran away, as fast as he could, off to his den. So piggy got safe home.

By-'n'-by, the wolf came along again, and knocked at the door.

'Who's there?' asked the tiny pig.

'Why, piggy! how did you get home?' asked the wolf. 'I got an awful fright; a barrel came rolling right at me, and I knew it was some trap of those awful men,—so I ran home.'

'Why, that was me!' said the tiny pig, laughing. 'I was in that barrel.'

Then the wolf gave an awful roar, to think he had been so foolish; and he said, in a dreadful voice:

'Now, piggy, you *must* let me in.'

'But I sha'n't let you in,' said piggy.

'Then I'll come down the chimney,' said the wolf.

So he began to climb up on the house.

But piggy pulled his feather bed up to the fireplace, and set it on fire. The wolf got on the chimney, and began to come down. But the horrible smoke and smell of the burning feathers choked him and smothered him, and he fell right down into the fire, and never troubled the tiny pig any more."

"I wonder what old Primkins'll say when we don't come home," said Rush.

"Oh, she'll say 'them children are up to some mischief again, I'll be bound,'" said Nimpo, bitterly. "Won't it be nice when the folks are back, and we can have our own home again?"

"I guess it will," said Rush. "Say, Nimp, it isn't so fine, boarding out, as you expected, is it?"

"I never thought Mrs. Primkins was so mean," said Nimpo, blushing at the recollection of her airs.

A long silence followed. The wind was rising, and a blind blew open up-stairs. Nimpo's book had made her nervous.

"Hark!" she said. "What's that?"

"It sounded like shutting a door!" whispered Rush.

"I believe some one's up-stairs," said Nimpo, excitedly.

Robbie, frightened at their manner, began to cry.

"Nimp, let's go back!" exclaimed Rush.

"Well," said Nimpo, hurriedly, "Robbie cries so!"

And, with very unusual haste, they got their things and hurried out, leaving the lamp burning, and locking the door on the outside. Then each took hold of one of Robbie's hands, and they ran as fast as they could fly to Mrs. Primkins'.

That lady was just shutting up the house for the night. Probably she suspected the state of the case, for she said, grimly, as they came in:

"I thought, mebbly you'd gone to stay this time."

"Rush," said Nimpo, as they went up-stairs, "we left that lamp burning!"

"So we did!" said Rush; "and, oh dear! our kittens, asleep on the bed! Well, they won't get hurt, I guess; and their saucer was half full of milk."

"And we can go over the first thing in the morning and get them," said Nimpo.

CHAPTER XVI.

RUSH RUNS AWAY.

You know, in the story-books, when boys are unhappy in their homes, it is customary for them to run away,—generally to sea,—and, after long years, come back very rich, drive into the village they left, with four prancing horses, forgive everybody, especially their enemies, take a big house, and live in fine style.

Well, Rush, though in general rather a quiet boy, had read a good many of these stories, and they had worked on his mind till, feeling very uncomfortable and unhappy at Mrs. Primkins', he gradually began to think it was a suitable epoch in his life to run away.

He had not said much about it, only occasionally a mysterious hint to Nimpo, which she thought nothing of. But his wrongs rankled in his soul;

and one morning, having left the hatchet out in the rain, he got a scolding from Mrs. Primkins, which decided him at once to start out in the world to seek his fortune.

He had no very definite plan as to where he wanted to go,—the sea-coast was hundreds of miles from him,—but he finally decided to go to Cleveland, thirty or forty miles off, where an acquaintance of his had lately gone to live.

This friend was a boy of his own age, and they had often talked over together plans for running away, and Rush knew if he could get to George Handy that he would join in the plan. To be sure, he had no idea of George's whereabouts in the city, but he thought he could ask the boys till he found him. So he went quietly upstairs and put on two pairs of pantaloons and two pairs of stockings, for he thought it would be his last chance to have any clothes for some time.

Nimpo noticed that he looked rather bunchy; but when she asked him what was the matter with his clothes, he said, "Nothing," and she

thought no more of it, but started off early to go to school with Anna Morris.

As soon as she was gone, Rush went up to her room, got some paper and a pen, and sat down to write a letter. Runaways always do that, you know. He wasn't much of a writer, but he stumbled on, and this is what he produced:

DEER SISTER:

When you get this I shall be fur of on the—no, on the way to a big city! I've run away.

Take care of Minzeyboo. I've taken 2 pants. That's what made me look bunchy.

It's 'cause old Primkins scolded me so.

Tell Mother I'll come back in a few years, and I send my love to her. Tell her I took my bow and arrows.

Robbie can have my sled.

R. RIEVOR.

This note he laid on the stand in Nimpo's room, and stole down-stairs like a thief. He needn't have been so careful though, for Mrs. Primkins was making pies in the kitchen, and she did not look up as he went through.

She had just been frying doughnuts, and the

jar full of them stood on the table, emitting a fresh and spicy odor. Rush looked longingly at them.

"Mrs. Primkins, may I have one?" he asked, timidly.

"No," was the harsh reply. "I can't stand round on my feet all day, frying doughnuts for good-for-nothing boys to eat between meals—not by a jug-full! You'll have them at the table, like the rest of us." And then, feeling still grieved about the hatchet, she went on: "I'm sure, if ever a body was glad I'll be, when your mother gets back and takes you all home agin. If I've got to have children around, I prefer to have the hull trainen of 'em, from the cradle up."

"You won't be troubled with me very long, Mrs. Primkins," Rush couldn't help saying, proudly.

"No, I know it; only two weeks more, thank goodness! and I can have some peace of my life once more!" And she lifted a finished pie on one hand, and cut off the superfluous upper crust with a vim.

Rush slipped out, went round to the shed and

got his bow and arrows, and started off on the road which the stage took when it went to Cleveland.

The road went past the store, and he thought he might as well go in and get something to eat. So in he went. None of the clerks noticed him, which surprised him, for he felt in such a tragic mood that he thought he must look different from his usual self.

He lounged about awhile, filling some pockets with crackers and raisins, and others with matches, to start his fires in the woods.

At last, about eleven o'clock, he finally started on his way. He walked up the hill past Mr. Stevens', where he saw Johnny playing in the back-yard, and he felt as if he had grown years older since last he played with him.

It was a lovely day, and Rush enjoyed his walk very much for two or three miles, till he began to get tired. Then he turned into the woods, which came up to the road on each side. He found a soft bed of moss, and laid down to rest. Of course he fell asleep.

When he awoke and sat up, he could not, for a moment, remember where he was. But it came to him very soon that he had run away, and as he had slept off his indignation about the scolding, it struck him, with a sort of a pang, that he was alone in the world, with his own way to make.

However, he got up to go on. But the moss he had slept on was rather damp, as moss is apt to be, and he felt stiff and sore.

"I declare, I believe it's getting night!" he said to himself, as he came to a clear place in the woods and saw how dark it was. "I'd better be shooting a bird for my supper, or I'll have to go hungry."

So he strung up his bow and prepared an arrow, and then began to look around for a bird or squirrel.

For a long time, not a living thing could he see, and he began to think the birds had left the country, and the squirrels taken refuge from his arms, in their holes. But at last he caught sight of a red squirrel sitting in a high branch of a

tree, his tail curled up over his back, and very busy nibbling a nut.

Rush couldn't desire a better mark, so he fired. Away scampered the squirrel, and Rush could not find him nor the arrow either.

Now, he had but two arrows left, and he began to feel discouraged, especially as it was getting quite dark, and, in following his game, he had lost his direction, and didn't know which way to go to find the road.

"Never mind!" he said. "I can make a fire, and camp out. I've always wanted to, and here's a splendid place for it, too. First, I must gather some sticks."

He threw down his bow and arrows, and started out to find sticks. But that was a droll piece of woods; scarcely a stick could he find. The trees were very high, and he couldn't reach the branches, and the pieces that he did find were so wet and decayed that, when he had collected half a dozen, and tried to light them, they refused to burn. In fact, he used all his matches, and could not produce a blaze.

"Well, it doesn't matter," he said at last—though rather faintly. "Other fellows have slept without a fire, and I can. Besides it's so warm one doesn't need a fire."

So he started back for the place he had left his bow and arrows, but he could not find it now. In vain he searched up and down in the growing darkness, and at last, quite disheartened, he lay down on the ground.

"If mother'd been home, I'd never have run away," said he; "and I might have stood it a week or two more," he added, after a minute. "I wonder what Nimpo's doing now. I wonder if she's found my note!"

Then he laid still and tried to go to sleep, but his long nap had made him wakeful, and he began to listen to the sounds in the woods.

First he heard a subdued chattering, as though some naughty squirrel was getting a scolding for staying out late; then he heard an owl, but though it sounded lonely, it did not frighten him, for he had heard owls before.

But soon he heard the breaking of sticks, not

far off, and at once he thought of bears. Now, bears were his pet horror. All Sarah's horrible stories had bears in them, and he had often lain awake at night, and thought he heard them scrambling up the side of the house.

To be sure his mother told him it was foolish, that bears were very seldom found in Ohio, still he knew there was occasionally one, and that left room for dread.

He sprang to his feet and listened. Again he heard the cracking of twigs, and it seemed to be nearer. Without stopping to think, letting his terror have complete control of him, he started and ran. His hat fell off; he stumbled over roots, and fell; he ran against trees, and was knocked nearly breathless; but on he ran, till he was fairly exhausted.

Then he stopped to listen. All was still once more, and as the ground was soft, and seemed very wet, he thought he would go more slowly, and try to get out of the woods. After wading about in the swamp he had stumbled into, falling over logs, getting confused and fearfully tired,

he caught sight of a light. It was very little, and dim, but it suggested people, and the poor boy thought nothing would be so welcome as the sight of a human being, unless it was a good supper.

He struggled on towards the light, scratching himself, tearing his clothes on the bushes, and cutting his feet on rough rocks.

At last he drew near the house. It was a mere cabin in the woods, and it had but one window, through which streamed the light.

Rush crept softly up to the house, for he did not like its looks.

"It looks like a robber's den," he said, "or the places in the books where old witches live." And though he did not really believe in witches, he couldn't help feeling rather shy about going in. Stealing up to the window, he stood on tiptoe, and looked in.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN THE WOODS.

It was a curious place, very roughly built, and no bigger than a small bedroom. On the walls hung guns,—two or three of them,—a sharp looking axe, and a hatchet. On one side was a sort of rude lounge frame, with blankets upon it, probably used as a bed.

On the floor lay a dead body of some kind, and stooping over it was a man.

The one miserable candle, stuck on a nail in the wall, gave a flickering light, and Rush could not see whether the object on the floor was the body of an animal, or of a boy.

The man was very busy with it. Rush could see the gleam of a knife now and then, and on the whole, he was about as much afraid of the

mysterious person in the hut, as he was of the dark outside. So he crept away again.

Before getting far, he heard the door of the hut open, and terror seized him once more. He started on another run.

He did not go far, however, for he ran with full force against a tree, which knocked him senseless, and he fell to the ground as though dead.

If any one had been there, he might have heard a voice say,

"Well, well! 'spects my ole ears done cheat me ag'in! I'ze shore I heerd somebody prowlin' round."

But Rush heard it not, nor any other sound. Nothing more did he know, till the sun was high in the heavens, when he came to himself, and sat up.

Stiff, and sore, and bruised, and weak, and deathly faint from hunger. All these he felt, and as he glanced at his clothes he was almost in doubt whether he was not mistaken in himself. His garments were a mere bundle of rags,—torn,

soiled, bloody rags. His shoes were half gone, his hair matted together, blood on his face and hands. Was this dirty ragamuffin Rush Rievor?

He staggered to his feet, and looked around. There, not a hundred feet off, was the cabin that had frightened him so much.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, recognizing it at once, "if that isn't Old Lisles' house! and that was the old darkey himself that I saw! What a fool I was! He'd have taken good care of me, he knows our folks."

Sure enough, it was the house of a queer old negro, who did odd jobs, like sawing wood, making gardens, and other little things in the village, enough to pay for his tobacco, and the few things he needed, and spent the rest of the time in hunting. He was called "Old Lisles," and he was considered half crazy, but was perfectly harmless, and good-natured.

Rush dragged himself up to the house, but no one was in. He looked in at the window, and saw that one of the guns was gone, and he concluded that Old Lisles was off on a hunt.

"Why I can't be more than two miles from home!" was his next thought, with—I must confess—a thrill of joy.

"Camping out, and running away, are real fun in the books, but I don't want any more of them. Ugh! what a horrid night I did have! I wish I hadn't written that letter," was the next reflection, with a blush. "I hope Nimpo didn't find it," but he did not feel much hope of that, for he had been careful to put it where she would find it.

So, well as he could, with his soaked shoes and stiff legs, he started off for home, well knowing the direction of the village from where he was. When he reached the neighborhood of houses, he slunk around on the back streets, for he could not bear to have any one see him.

"If I could only get into the house without any body knowing me, and fix myself up," was his anxious thought now. With a hat, it wouldn't have been quite so bad, for he could have pulled it over his eyes, and perhaps people would not recognize him.

But he had no such good luck. Johnny Stevens was the first one to see him, and he shouted:

"Oh! oh! Rush's been fighting!" and similar greeting he received from every boy he met.

He avoided going past the store, and crawled into Mrs. Primkins' yard the back way, through a broken fence. He hoped most fervently, that she would not see him, but every thing was against him on that occasion. She was hanging out clothes in the yard, and she saw him in a moment.

"Well, well!" was her remark, "what under the canopy have you been up to now? If your ma don't come home soon, you'll be a vagabond on the face of the earth."

Rush made no reply, but hurried up-stairs, glad to get off so easily. At the head of the attic stairs he met Nimpo, his letter in her hand, and a look of horror in her face. She had just found it, and the cry she was about to give, died on her lips at sight of him.

"Why, Rush!" she began, but he interrupted.

"Don't say a word, Nimp, and I'll tell you all

about it. Come in here," and he pulled her into the room.

Then, while he took off what was left of his shoes, and washed his face and hands, Nimpo sat on the edge of the bed, and heard his story. She was shocked with his adventures, but at his earnest request she promised not to tell, and also—which was harder—to get him something to eat.

"Old Primkins's hanging up clothes," said he, "I guess she won't see you."

Nimpo went down, and brought him a piece of bread, and a cold potato. Rush, though not very fond of these delicacies, devoured them with a relish. Then Nimpo helped him comb his hair, and bind up his various cuts and scratches.

"But why didn't you find out last night?" he asked.

"Why I stayed with Anna Morris all night, and Robbie did too, and I suppose Mrs. Primkins thought you were with us. Anyway she didn't say any thing about you when I came home a little while ago, and found your letter. O Rush!



"NIMPO SAT ON THE BED WHILE RUSH TOLD HIS STORY."
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how *could* you run away! How mother would feel."

"Well, I've got enough of it anyway," said Rush earnestly. "Don't tell mother—you know you promised."

"I won't," said Nimpo, "but you must promise not to try it again."

"Try it again? I don't believe you'll catch a fellow twice in that scrape!"

Rush did not succeed in keeping the affair secret. It all leaked out somehow. The boys who saw him come home teased him, and the boys that saw him starting off, jumped at the truth of the story, and before the day was over, every body in town knew that Rush had run away.

The clerks at the store laughed at him; the boys plagued him; Mrs. Primkins talked to him half an hour in her solemn parlor, on his wickedness; his Sunday-school teacher told him dreadful stories of the bad end of runaways; and in every way life was made a burden to him, till he told Nimpo he had a good mind to run away again.

But with all that was said to him, not a word could any one draw out of him. Nimpo, too, kept her word and told nothing. So, although there were many conjectures about it, the true story of his adventures never was known, and after a few days the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. PRIMKINS IS SURPRISED.

ONE morning Mrs. Primkins received a letter. This was a very unusual occurrence, and she hastened to wipe her hands out of the dish water, hunt up her "specs," clean them elaborately, and at last sit down in her chintz-covered "Boston rocker" to enjoy it at her leisure. Meanwhile Nimpo was finishing her breakfast, and did not observe her.

Mrs. Primkins, having found her scissors and deliberately cut around the seal, opened the sheet, and glancing at the name at the bottom of the page, turned her eyes hastily towards Nimpo, with a low, significant "humph!" Still Nimpo did not see her, and Mrs. Primkins went on to read the letter, hastily covering with her hands something which fell from the first folds.

Very deliberately she read it from date to signature, twice over, and ending as she had begun, with a significant "humph!" she refolded the sheet, slipped in the enclosure, put it into her black silk bag, which hung on the back of her chair, and resumed her dish washing.

Nimpo, having finished her breakfast, gathered up her books, and hurried off to school, though it was two hours too early, never dreaming that the letter had any thing to do with her.

After the morning work was done,—the pans scalded and set in the sun; the house tidied for the day; the vinegar reheated and poured over the walnuts that were pickling; the apples that were drying turned over; the piece of muslin, "bolt" she called it, that was bleaching on the grass, thoroughly sprinkled; and in fact every thing in doors and out, in perfect order,—Mrs. Primkins sat down to consider.

She drew the letter from the bag, and read it again, carefully inspecting a ten-dollar bill in her hands, and then leaned back, and indulged herself in an unheard-of luxury,—a rest of five

minutes with her hands idle! If Nimpo had chanced to come in, she would have been alarmed at such an extraordinary state of things, but she was at that moment in her seat at the school-house, with wrinkled brow, wrestling with sundry conundrums in her "Watts on the Mind," little suspecting that her fate was hanging in the balance in Mrs. Primkins' kitchen at that moment.

At last Mrs. Primkins' thin lips opened; she was alone in the house, and she began to talk to herself.

"Wants her to have a birthday party! humph! I must say I can't see the good of pampering children 's folks do nowadays! When I was young now, we had something to think of besides fine clothes, unwholesome food, and worldly dissipation! I must say I think Mis' Rievor has some very oncommon idees. Hows'ever," she went on, contemplating fondly the bill she still held in her hand, "I do' know's I have any call to fret my gizzard if she chooses to potter away her money. I don't see my way clear to refuse alto-

gether to do what she asks, 's long's the child's on my hands. 'Ten dollars! Humph! She 'hopes it will be enough to provide refreshments for them!' It's my private opinion it will, and a mite over for—for—other things," she added resolutely, closing her lips with a snap. "I ain't such a shif'less manager's all that comes to, I do hope! 'Twon't take no ten dollars to give a birthday party in *my* house, I bet a cooky!"

That night when supper was over, and Nimpo was about to go up-stairs, Mrs. Primkins stopped her. "Nimpo," she said, "wait a bit. I got a letter from your ma to-day."

"Did you?" exclaimed Nimpo, alarmed. "O, what's the matter?"

"Don't fly into tifics! nothing is the matter," said Mrs. Primkins.

"Is she coming home?" was the next eager question.

"No; not yet," fell like cold water on her hopes, "but she says to-morrow's your birthday."

"Why!—so it is!" said Nimpo, reflecting. "I never thought of it!"

"Well, she thinks perhaps I'd best let you have a few of your friends to tea on that day, if it won't be too much of a chore for me," went on Mrs. Primkins.

Nimpo's face was radiant. "O Mrs. Primkins, if you will!" but it fell again; "but where could they be," for trespassing on the dismal glories of the Primkins' parlor never entered her wildest dreams.

"I've thought of that," said Mrs. Primkins grimly. "Of course I couldn't abide a pack of young ones tramping up my best parlor carpet, and I thought maybe I'd put a few things up in the second story, and let you have 'em there."

"Oh! that will be splendid!" said Nimpo eagerly. "But—but—" she hesitated, "could they take tea here?" and she glanced around the kitchen.

"No: I shall set the table in the back chamber, and let them play in the front one. We can put some chairs in, and I'm sure a bare floor is more suitable for a pack of young ones."

"Oh yes! we won't be afraid of hurting that.

O that'll be grand!" continued Nimpo, as the plan grew on her. "I thank you so much, Mrs. Primkins! and we'll be so careful not to hurt any thing."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Primkins, who didn't think it necessary to mention the ten-dollar bill, "you're a master hand to promise."

"I know I forget sometimes," said Nimpo penitently, "but I'll try really to be careful this time."

"Well," said Mrs. Primkins in conclusion, as she took her knitting and sat down for the evening, "if you don't hector me nigh about to death, I'll lose my guess; but as I'm in for't you may's well bring the girls when you come from school to-morrow. Then you'll have time to play before supper, for their mothers'll want them home before dark."

"Do you care who I invite?" asked Nimpo, pausing, with the door open, on her way to her room.

"No: I do' know's I do; your intimate friends your ma said."

"Oh goody!" said Nimpo as she skipped up-

stairs two at a time to tell the news to Rush.
"How nice that'll be! won't we have fun!"

The next morning she was off bright and early, and before the bell rang every girl in the school knew that Nimpo was going to have a birthday party, and was wondering if she would be invited; at recess she issued her invitations, every one of which was promptly accepted, and in the afternoon all came in their best dresses, ready to go home with her after school.

At four o'clock, Nimpo marshalled her friends and started. Now the truth was that the girls had been so very lovely to her when she was inviting, that she found it hard to distinguish between intimate friends, and those not so intimate, so she had asked more than she realized till she saw them started up the street. However, she had not been limited as to numbers, so she gave herself no concern, as she gaily led the way.

Meanwhile the Primkins' family had been busy. After the morning work was done, Mrs. Primkins and Augusta made a loaf of wholesome plain cake, a couple of tins of biscuits, and about the same

number of cookies with caraway seeds in them. After dinner they carried a table into the back chamber, and spread the feast. Nimpo's mother had sent as a birthday present, a beautiful new set of toy dishes. It had come in the stage while Nimpo was at school, and Augusta thought it would be nice to serve the tea on these dishes. Not being able to think of any serious objection, and seeing advantage in the small pieces required to fill them, Mrs. Primkins had consented, and Augusta had taken pains to spread a very pretty table, all with its white and gilt china. The biscuits and cookies were cut small to match, and when all was ready it really looked quite nice, with its toy slices of cake, and one small dish of jelly, from the top shelf in Mrs. Primkins' pantry.

During the afternoon, a boy came up from the store with several pounds of nuts and raisins and candy which Cousin Will sent up, by Nimpo's father's orders.

Every thing was ready, and Mrs. Primkins had put on a clean checked apron to do honor to the

occasion, and sat down in her rocker, feeling that she had earned a good rest, when Augusta's voice sounded from the stairway—

“Ma, do look down street!”

Mrs. Primkins went to the window that looked towards the village, and was struck with horror.

“Land's sake! Why, what under the canopy! Did you ever!” came from her lips in quick succession; for there was Nimpo the centre of a mob of girls, all in Sunday best, as her experienced eye saw at a glance.

“Ma,” exclaimed Augusta, rushing down, “I do believe that young one has invited the whole school!”

“The trollop!” was all Mrs. Primkins could get out in her exasperation.

“I'd send 'em right straight home!” said Augusta indignantly, “it's a burning shame!”

“Mercy on us! this is a pretty kittle of fish!” gasped Mrs. Primkins.

“I wouldn't stand it! so there!” said Augusta sharply. “I never did see such a girl! I'd just send every chick and child home, and let Miss

Nimpo take her supper alone, to pay her off! Things have come to a pretty pass, I think!"

"I never did see!" ejaculated Mrs. Primkins, not yet recovering her ordinary powers of speech.

"Shall I go and meet them, and send them packing?" said Augusta.

"No," said Mrs. Primkins reluctantly, remembering the unbroken bill in her "upper drawer." "I do' know's I have a right to send them home. I didn't tell her how many; but land! who'd dream of such a raft! If there's one there's forty I do declare!" Here a new idea struck her. "But those dishes! and that table! for such a crowd! Augusta," hastily, "fly round like a parched pea, and lock the doors of the room till I think what we can do. This is a party with a vengeance!"

Augusta ran up-stairs—and was hardly in the room before the girls crowded into the front chamber.

Being a "party," of course they had to go into the house, but as soon as they had thrown off their sun-bonnets, which was in about a second, and begun to look around the bare room to see

what they should do next, Nimpo was seized with a bright idea.

"Girls, let's go out in the yard and play till tea-time." The next moment sun-bonnets were resumed, and the whole troop tramped down the back stairs, and in two minutes were deep in the game of "Pom, Pom, peel away."

Now was Mrs. Primkins' chance. She hastily sent Augusta to the neighbors—letting her out the front door so the "party" should not see her—to beg or borrow something to feed the crowd, for her own pantry could furnish but one loaf of bread, and a few doughnuts, and there wasn't such a thing as a bakery in the village. As soon as she was gone, Mrs. Primkins cleared the table up-stairs, hid the small biscuits and minute slices of cake, and brought tables from other rooms to lengthen out the one already there. She then carried every plate, and cup, and glass, of her own up there, and made several surreptitious journeys to accommodating neighbors, to borrow, telling the news and getting their sympathy in her trials, so that they freely lent their dishes,

and even sent their boys to carry them over, and their big girls to help arrange. For an hour the games went on, in the side yard, while a steady stream came in at the front door,—the imposing front door! and up the august front stairs!—carrying bread, cake, dishes, sauces, etc., etc., till there was a tolerable supply, and Mrs. Primkins was in debt numerous loaves of bread and cake, and dishes of sweatmeats.

At five o'clock they were called in and before their sharp young appetites every thing disappeared like dew in the sunshine. It was a queer meal,—bread of various shapes and kinds, and not a large supply; cakes, an equally miscellaneous collection, from cup cake which old Mrs. Kellogg had kept in a jar two months “in case any body dropped in unexpected,” to bread cake fresh from somebody else's oven; cookies of a dozen kinds and shapes, generally very plain; doughnuts and ginger cakes, and half a dozen dishes of “preserves,” no two alike. But all deficiencies were nothing to them when they came to the nuts and candies, for of these there was no lack. Augusta

had filled every extra dish in the house with the delicious things, and no doubt the children ate shocking amounts of trash.

But they had a splendid time. The entertainment was exactly to their liking: little bread and butter, and much candy and raisins.

After disposing of every thing on the table, except a little candy which Nimpo insisted on their pocketing, they flocked into the front room, where Mrs. Primkins told them they might play awhile, if they wouldn't make a noise, as a little sprinkle of rain had come up.

To insure quiet, every girl took off her shoes, and played in stocking feet, on the bare, rough floor, for an hour. Suddenly Nimpo held up her foot.

"Girls, look a there!" The soles of her stockings were in awful holes. Her tone was tragic, all eyes were instantly turned on her, and forty feet were simultaneously elevated to view. The tale was the same! every stocking sole was black as the ground, and worn to rags!

"*What will ma say!*" rose in horror to every lip.

This terrible thought sobered them at once, and finding it time to go, shoes were hastily sought out of the pile in the corner, sun-bonnets donned, and slowly the long procession moved down the back stairs, and out on to the street, while Nimpo flung herself on to the little bed in her room, and sighed with happiness, "O wasn't it just splendid; and I know mother'll forgive my stockings, besides I'll wash them myself and darn them, so Mrs. Primkins sha'n't see them."

When it was all over, and Mrs. Primkins and Augusta, assisted by two or three neighbors, had cleared up,—washed and returned dishes; brought down tables and chairs; swept out front hall, and reduced it to its normal condition of dismal stiffness; and the neighbors had gone home,—Augusta sat down to reckon up debts, while Mrs. Primkins "set the bread." Augusta brought out a paper she had kept, and read—

"Mrs. A. — loaves of bread — cake.

Mrs. B. " " " "

Mrs. C. " " 1 dish preserves."

and so on.

Mrs. Primkins listened to the whole list, and made a mental calculation of how much of the ten dollars it would take to pay up. The calculation must have been satisfactory for her face relaxed almost into a smile, as she set the pan on the table, covered the sponge, and washed her hands.

“Well, don’t let your pa get away in the morning, till he splits up a good pile of oven wood. We’ll heat up the brick oven, and have over Mis’ Kent’s Mary Ann to help. I guess the money’ll cover the expenses, an’ I can pay Mary Ann in cold victuals.”

CHAPTER XIX.

SEWING SOCIETY AT MRS. PRIMKINS'.

"NIMP," shouted Rush, meeting her on the street, slowly walking home from school, a few days after the birthday, "there's a party at our house!"

"I guess not! Mrs. Primkins have a party! I think I see her!" said Nimpo scornfully.

"But there is," went on Rush eagerly, "I saw 'em! The parlor is full, and the windows are open—and the front hall is full of ladies."

"Oh yes," said Nimpo; "come to think, it's the Sewing Society. I forgot it was going to meet there to-day."

"And there's lots of goodies for tea," Rush went on in a lower tone, dancing along by the side of the girls, for as usual Anna Morris was with Nimpo. "I peeked into the pantry, and saw. Au-

gusta is setting the table in the dining-room—an awful long table—'n there's raisin cake, 'n plum preserves, 'n cookies, 'n biscuits, 'n cold tongue,—ain't it jolly?"

"I suppose Mrs. Primkins would have a nice tea for the Sewing Society, if we do always have just bread and milk or something like that," said Nimpo, "but it must seem funny to have the table in the dining-room."

"I wonder if we can go to the first table," said Rush anxiously, just remembering that there were a good many people to take tea.

"Of course not," said Anna in a superior way, "we always have to wait when ma has Sewing Society. There's never room. But it's nicer so, because every body's busy, and we can do as we're a mind to. We can 'most always have as much cake as we can eat—if there's enough left."

I can always have as much cake as I want when mother's home," said Nimpo, in her loftiest manner.

Anna looked in amazement at the girl who

could have as much cake as she wanted, but Rush burst out,

"Well *I* can't then! I *never* had enough cake. I hope old Primkins made a stack of it this time."

"You may be sure she didn't," said Nimpo, "and she'll not be too busy to put every bit away except two small pieces for us—see if she is! I shouldn't wonder if she gave us our supper in the kitchen after all, it's just like her."

"Well—we won't be there very long anyway, that's one good thing," said Rush. "It seems as if mother'd been gone a year."

"So it does," said Nimpo. "I never thought weeks could be so long," and she stopped before the gate.

Sure enough, the house wore a very unusual look. The front windows open; the green shades rolled up, letting the afternoon sun stream in over the gay carpet, and over groups of ladies engaged in talking, and sewing; and worse still the front door open and the solemn front hall, which Nimpo could only think of as pitch dark

and smelling of varnish, all light, and full of busy workers, who had been crowded out of the small parlor.

Nimpo stole in quietly, and slipped around to the back door. On entering the kitchen, she found Mrs. Primkins and Augusta hurrying about, cutting cake, and dishing out sweetmeats from two big stone jars. She paused a moment, as what hungry school girl would not, but Mrs. Primkins spoke,

"Go 'way now, children! Don't bother!"

"Had I better—shall I put on another dress?" asked Nimpo hesitating, not knowing how much she would be expected to mingle with the guests.

"No, I do' know's there's any need," said Mrs. Primkins, "you haven't any call to go into the front room, an' of course there won't be room for you at the first table."

Nimpo felt a lump in her throat, and the tears came very near to her eyes. Not because she cared for the company, for she was naturally shy, and preferred to be in the background, but this cool way of putting her into the kitchen

made her desperately homesick for a moment. She was going quietly to her room, but Rush was not so easily silenced.

"Ain't we going to have any supper?" he demanded.

"Of course," said Mrs. Primkins shortly; "but you'll take it at the second table, where there'll be only Augusta and Mis' Willard's Jane—what she brought her along for, I can't make out," she added to herself.

"Can't we have any cake'n things?" Rush went on, his boyish appetite getting the better of his indignation at being treated so.

Mrs. Primkins turned towards him, with carving knife held suspended over the loaf of cake she was cutting into wedges, and said severely,

"If you behave yourself, and keep out of the way, you will have a piece of tea cake, and a dish of sauce; if you're a bother, not a crumb will you get but good, wholesome bread and butter,—and that's good enough for anybody," she added.

Quite quenched, Rush stole up-stairs after Nim-

po, and they had a good homesick talk together for a little while. But boyhood isn't easily kept down, and before long Rush was in the upper front hall, looking over the banisters at the company below, and running back to tell Nimpo who was there, while she, scorning to enjoy society in that surreptitious way, busied herself with her kitten, nursing her homesick feelings, and pouring out her woes to the sympathizing Squitz.

Sitting at the foot of the stairs, busily stitching away at a piece of muslin, was Rush's special antipathy—Miss Jones. She was a lady of about fifty years, who wore glasses, little corkscrew curls, "skimpy" black dresses, and "minced" as she walked. This lady had forgotten that she was ever young—if indeed she ever had been, which was impossible to imagine. She had a horror of children, especially boys. She was always looking out for sticky fingers, and muddy shoes, and waving away every child who was unfortunate enough to approach her.

Naturally this made her the object of all the boyish mischief in the village, and it was particu-

larly unfortunate that she had seated herself in so tempting a position, for an aching desire to throw something down on her tormented Rush from the moment he discovered her. A wriggling worm now, or a spider, dropped into her lap to make her jump and scream; or a few drops of water sprinkled over her, would be such fun. But though he searched diligently, Mrs. Primkins was far too thorough with her broom to encourage the residence of any peace-loving spider under her roof, and the drops of water—though tempting—would be sure to suggest “boys” to her suspicious mind, and that involved the danger of losing his one poor little piece of cake. So he contented himself—in a measure—by bringing the pillow from his room, and making believe to himself that he was going to throw it down to break the high shell comb, which stood upon her head like a banner, guarding a thin wisp of hair.

Now whatever was the matter that unlucky afternoon; whether the thread which sewed the pillow was worthless; whether the ticking had become worn; or whether the unusual self-control

of the boy in only pretending to throw it, was too much for him, it happened thus. He brought down the pillow with a bang on the banister two or three times, and finding that Miss Jones was too busy talking to hear it, he collected his energies for a final slap, intending to make a noise that she should hear, and then quietly slip back into his own room before she saw him.

But alas for Rush! the blow was too hard for the pillow—it burst!—and a cloud of feathers filled the air. There was a low exclamation of horror—a hasty scamper of feet—a rush down the back stairs—a slam of the lower door—and Rush was gone!

But how shall I paint the scene in the hall when the shower of feathers fluttered down, all over the “spick and span” black dress of Miss Jones, nestling in her hair, clinging fondly to her worsted drapery, sticking tight to her sleeve. And not only that, but sailing impartially over all the ladies near, sticking with the well-known tenacity of feathers, to dresses and hair, and—horror of horrors!—covering the immaculate carpet, where

foot of child never came, and where broom and dust-pan had things all their own way.

The bountiful contents of that pillow were not confined to the hall; the parlor came in for a share. The summer breeze scattered them freely, right and left, even through the door into the dining-room, which Mrs. Primkins opened in haste, when she heard the confusion.

For confusion there was! vast and dire, from the jump and scream of Miss Jones (which poor Rush didn't see after all, though it was ten times worse than he had thought), till every lady threw down her work and devoted her undivided energies to pulling off feathers from hair and dress. But each liberated feather cheerfully flew off in the air and settled on some one else, so the labor was without result,—except great confusion of tongues.

The noise brought Mrs. Primkins, but who shall tell her feelings? As soon as she heard from which direction the shower came, her quick thought pounced on the cause.

“That pesky boy!” was her exclamation, and

she fairly bounded up-stairs to seize the culprit. No culprit was there—luckily for his bones!—nothing but the collapsed pillow to tell the tale. She wildly rushed to the attic, and found Nimpo alone with the kitten, and so serene and unconscious that even she couldn't suspect her.

"Where's Rush?" she shouted, in a tone that, added to her wild look, frightened Nimpo with the thought that she had suddenly gone crazy. The kitten fell to the floor, and Nimpo prepared for flight.

"Where's Rush, I say?" repeated Mrs. Primkins threateningly.

"I—I—don't know," stammered Nimpo.

"Isn't he hid here?" was the next question, emphasized by a most vigorous search, under beds, behind boxes where a cat could not have crawled, out on the roof, behind pillows. It lasted but a minute, but it was exhaustive,—not a mouse could have escaped that searching eye.

"What's the matter?" gasped Nimpo.

"Matter enough!" said Mrs. Primkins angrily; "just let me lay my hands on him, and I'll teach

him a lesson he won't forget the longest day he lives!" and she rushed down-stairs again. Nimpo followed her, with a vague idea of rescuing Rush from her insane clutches, for, though she was frightened half out of her wits, she did not forget that she was Rush's protector while mother was gone.

When she reached the front part of the house—now in such unwonted bustle—she comprehended the trouble, and was not surprised at Mrs. Primkins' excitement, while she devoutly hoped Rush would keep out of the way.

Brooms and brushes and busy fingers, after a while, restored a measure of order to the startled Sewing Society, and it gathered around the table to soothe its ruffled feelings with numerous cups of tea. Till now Nimpo had been glad that Rush did not come back, but as night came on, and tea was over, and she went down to the cheerless "second table," a great dread came into her heart.

"Has Rush run away again?" was the thought that gave her anxiety.

Mrs. Primkins was more quiet—tea had soothed her too, but she did not speak of Rush, and no plate was set for him.

Nimpo choked down part of a biscuit and her dish of sweetmeats, but her slice of cake she slyly slipped into her pocket, with a biscuit, for Rush if he *did* come back, though the horror was growing on her that she should never see him again, and “What would mother say?”

Silently she left the table, and returned to her own room, where she sat by the open window, with her only comfort—her kitten—and cried, and talked to it, and longed for home and mother, and, in fact, was as miserable and homesick as a girl can be.

Hours passed away; the company went home, and the Primkins' family went to bed. Nimpo could not go to bed, anxiety kept her wide awake. So she still sat by the window with her sound-asleep kitten in her arms, when—about ten o'clock—she heard a noise in the yard. A scramble—a scrape—and something crawled from the fence on to the roof of the kitchen under her window.

She was frightened, and rose to shut the window, but a thought struck her.

"Rush, is that you?" she whispered.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Be careful and don't fall," she said hastily, "and come to my window, it's easier to get in."

A moment more and he scrambled in, hatless, dusty, and altogether looking as though he had been sleeping under a hedge with the gipseys.

"Where have you been?" was Nimpo's first question, when she had carefully locked the door (by putting a chair against it).

"Down back of our house," said Rush doggedly, "an' I haven't had a thing to eat—an' what did she say, Nimp?"

"Oh she was awful!" said Nimpo. "I thought she was crazy! It was good you weren't here. I believe she would have half killed you! I never saw her so mad."

"Well, I didn't mean to," said Rush, "but I knew she wouldn't believe a fellow,—she never does,—so I just thought I'd scatter, and I didn't dare to come back. What did Miss Jones do?"

he asked with interest; "if it hadn't been for her I shouldn't have thought of it. I hope she got a lot on her!"

Nimpo laughed faintly—the first time since the accident—at the picture she remembered of Miss Jones dancing wildly around, picking off feathers with both hands.

"But it was awful, Rush! You never saw such a fuss!—they went all over the parlor, and into the dining-room. Every lady in there was covered, and they had to sweep, and it was an hour before they could sit down."

"I suppose old Primkins'll be mad enough to eat me in the morning," said Rush gloomily. "What would you do, Nimp? would you go down to the store and stay?"

"You can't," said Nimpo; "but I guess she won't by morning. She didn't say any thing when I went to tea. Oh!—here's a piece of cake I saved for you, and a biscuit," she went on, giving him the unusual dainties.

"Thank you," said Rush quite humbly. "I'm most starved, 'n you're real good, Nimp."

"I'm glad it's most time for the folks to come home," said Nimpo irrelevantly, with a sigh.

"So'm I," said Rush, with his mouth full of cake.

By morning Mrs. Primkins had time to get cool, and to reflect that after all, it was no doubt an accident, for Rush—though full of fun—was not malicious, and it could be paid for also. So when Rush timidly slunk in to breakfast and slid into his seat, she said nothing, but,

"Humph! I shall charge your pa with three pounds of live geese feathers, young man."

Nimpo breathed more freely, and consoled herself with the thought—

"Well, mother won't make a fuss, and I don't believe feathers cost much anyhow."

CHAPTER XX.

NIMPO RIDES HORSEBACK.

NIMPO fully intended to be, or do, something wonderful in the world—something quite out of the ordinary way. What it would be, she couldn't exactly decide.

For a long time she thought it would be nice to be a poet, to wear her hair in long curls, and always look sad; and secretly, in the solitude of her own room, spurred on by the wonderful stories of infant poets, she had now and then attempted to make verses.

She never had the least trouble with the first line. That would always roll off poetical and grand; the second line was the hard one. There was the rhyme—to begin with, and then she was prejudiced with the idea that it must have some

sense in it, which naturally limited her freedom. I'm obliged to acknowledge that with all her yearnings poor Nimpo never got beyond the first line.

This was truly discouraging, and she next tried her hand at prose writing. In this she had no difficulty about stringing words together, and getting her gorgeously arrayed heroine into fearful troubles and horrifying perils, but to bring her out safely and smoothly again with any show of probability, and, worst of all, to read again what she had scribbled so hurriedly in the excitement of composition, were really tasks beyond her powers.

She became more modest in her ambitions, and her next fancy was to learn to ride on horseback. Her father owned a horse, a gentle old white horse, perfectly safe for any body, and while he was away Charley stood most of the time idle, in the stable. Nimpo thought it would be a splendid time to begin. She did not tell Rush, because he could ride already, and was so important and patronizing that it vexed her very soul, but she confided her whole plan to Anna Mor-

ris, and one day when Rush was spending the day with Johnny Stevens, she and Anna went to the house.

Old Charley stood in the stall, contentedly munching hay, the bridle hung on a peg near by, and the saddle was thrown across an old sleigh in the corner.

"Nimpo," said Anna, "can you saddle a horse?"

"Of course I can!" said Nimpo scornfully. "Rush does it every day, and I guess I can do it if he can."

This was said very boldly; but if the truth must be told, Nimpo quaked to the very sole of her shoes. She had often fed old Charley with grass and apples, but somehow when she stood by him in the stall, he seemed so big and strong she was afraid of him. However, she knew he was harmless, and she was bound to behave like the heroine she had set out to be. Bravely she walked up to his head.

The honest old fellow thought she had come to bring him an apple, so he turned his head around quickly.

"Whoa!" shouted Nimpo. Trembling, she untied his halter, and stepping outside the stall, tried to pull him out. But he was contented, and had no idea of stirring. Her gentle pull did not disturb him much. He just tossed his head, and jerked the halter out of her hand.

Nimpo gave a little scream.

"What's the matter?" asked Anna anxiously, standing safely out by the door.

"He won't come out,—and he jerked the halter away," said Nimpo.

"Ain't you afraid of him?—you better wait till Rush comes," said timid Anna.

"Not I!" said Nimpo bravely, getting hold of the halter again. "He would laugh at me."

This time she stood at his head and said, "Back, sir!" to him. Charley seemed to take it as a joke, and looked good-naturedly at her. But Nimpo began to be vexed, and she gave him a gentle slap or two, and at last he slowly backed out of the stall.

Nimpo led him into the yard. Meantime Anna had brought the bridle.

"How do they get this on?" asked Anna.

"Oh easy enough!" said Nimpo. "I've seen Rush. You just hold on to this lock of hair, while I pull off the halter."

"I'm afraid to touch him," said Anna.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Nimpo. "He won't hurt you, I've fed him a hundred times."

Anna seized the lock of hair which hung down between his ears, and Nimpo pulled off the halter. Then she took the bridle.

"First they put in the bits," said she. "Charley, open your mouth!"

Charley looked at her—but did not mind.

"Charley!" said she, very severely, "open your mouth, sir! Oh dear! what do they say to horses, I wonder?"

"Seems to me," said Anna, "I've heard that they hold a horse's nose to make him open his mouth."

"Well, you hold it, while I get the bits in," said Nimpo.

Anna grasped Charley's nose, whereupon he gave a great snort, jerked away, pranced across

the yard, and in the further corner turned and looked at them wickedly.

Both the girls yelled "whoa!" and ran after him.

But his long rest had made him frisky, and a fine chase they had, through the garden, across the barnyard, up to the front gate, and back to the stable.

Panting and heated, with dresses all dirt, and shoes all wet, they at last—with the help of an apple—caught him again. When he opened his mouth to take the apple, Nimpo basely imposed upon him, and slipped the bits in.

The next thing was to get the bridle over his ears. She could not pull it over, with all her tugging, and she did not dare to bend his ears down, for fear it would hurt him.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed in dismay, "how do they get his ears in?"

"Don't they unbuckle it?" asked Anna.

"I don't see any place," said Nimpo. "I wonder if it will hurt if I bend them over."

"I guess not, try it carefully," said Anna.

So Nimpo, holding on tightly to the bridle so the bit should not slip out, made one or two experiments, and finding that he took no notice, she boldly bent the ears down, and slipped it to its place.

"There!" she said exultantly, "now I guess we've got him! Now for the saddle, will you get it?"

Anna dragged it out, but could not lift it up. Then Nimpo tied Charley to the fence, and both tried to lift it up—without success. At last Anna established herself on the wood-pile, holding the saddle, while Nimpo tried to lead Charley up so that she could throw it on. But Charley was not anxious to wear the saddle, and she had to lead him up about a dozen times before he would go near enough.

Then Anna had to throw it, and it came so suddenly, it made Charley jump. Both girls shouted "whoa!" again, but Nimpo held on well, so he didn't get away.

"Now, Anna," said Nimpo, "you hold the bridle while I buckle up the straps."

Anna, sitting on the wood-pile, took the bridle, and Nimpo proceeded to fasten on the saddle.

"Oh dear!" she said, after trying a few minutes, "I can't get it up to the hole,—it's too tight!"

"They always make it tight," said Anna.

"But this will hurt him, I know," answered Nimpo. "I'll have to let it be in the next hole," which she did.

"Now he's ready," said Anna; "how'll you get on?"

"I'll get on the fence, and you lead him up."

No sooner said than done. Nimpo mounted the fence, and after several trials, Anna succeeded in inducing him to walk near enough for Nimpo to seize the horn of the saddle, and very carefully seat herself—feeling dreadfully insecure and shaky.

"I don't see how they keep on," she said. "I know I should fall if Charley took a step."

"I know," said Anna, "put your knee over that horn, and the other foot in the stirrup."

Nimpo did so, but still she had to hold on with both hands.

Anna kept the bridle and led him up and down from the front gate to the stable, till Nimpo was a little used to it, and felt somewhat safer.

"Now I'll take the bridle myself and drive," she said.

Anna handed it up, and Nimpo drove off, up and down.

"Oh I shall soon learn!" she said bravely; "it's real easy now. But this yard's so small; I've a good mind to go out in the street a little way."

"But how you'll look without any riding skirt!" said Anna.

"I can get a skirt," said Nimpo—her courage rising—"I'll take mother's black alpaca skirt."

"Perhaps she won't like it," suggested Anna.

"Oh she won't care!" said Nimpo, "will you go in and get it?"

Anna said she would, and while she was gone Nimpo rode up and down once or twice, and when she came out, Nimpo rode up to the wood-pile,

and Anna held Charley while she got off, slipped the skirt on, and climbed back again.

Then she felt very fine and young-lady-ish, with her long black skirt, although she also had on a brown gingham waist, and a slat sun-bonnet.

"Now, Anna," she said with dignity, "open the gate, and let me ride out."

Anna opened the gate.

"Don't you stay long," she called after her, "or I'll go home."

"I won't," replied Nimpo.

For a little way Charley walked on as usual, and Nimpo felt quite important, sitting up very straight, and looking as imposing and as much like a heroine as she could under the circumstances.

But in a minute or two, Charley set up a trot. The first jounce brought a little scream and a violent "whoa!" from Nimpo; but Charley didn't care a bit for that; on he trotted, and Nimpo, jarred and jolted, held on with both hands feeling that every moment was her last. Her bonnet fell back, and her skirt blew up. To add to her

troubles, some boys saw her and shouted, and started old Charley into a gallop.

That was easier to endure, but Nimpo felt that she couldn't hold on another minute, when they came to the creek. There was a bridge, but—alas!—there was also a ford, and Charley generally had a drink there. So down he marched,—in spite of Nimpo's efforts—away into the middle of the creek, before he stopped to drink.

Then Nimpo straightened up and prepared to resume her dignity, but at that fatal moment the bridle fell over Charley's head.

"Now I can never get him home," said Nimpo in despair. "Oh dear, what shall I do!—and I do believe this horrid old saddle's coming off."

True enough, it was slowly turning, and Nimpo saw that she must go into the water. She had just time to draw her foot out of the stirrup, and seize old Charley's mane, when the saddle slid over, and plump she went into the middle of the stream, which fortunately was not much more than a foot deep.

Charley looked around at her, and then went

on with his drinking. Nimpo gathered up her skirt, and very wet, and very hot, she seized the bridle and dragged the animal out. On the bank a good-natured boy slipped the saddle up to its place, and Nimpo started for home, leading the horse, and dragging her mother's dress through the dust.

The boys laughed and shouted at her, but she pulled her friendly sun-bonnet over her burning face, and, wet and draggled, she at last reached home. Anna sympathized with her, and they tied old Charley in the stall, bridle and all. And great was the wonder of Cousin Will that night, when he went to feed Charley, to find him saddled and bridled.

"Rush," asked Nimpo the next time she saw him, in a careless sort of way, "how do you get the bits into a horse's mouth?"

"Just stick in your thumb back of the front teeth," said Rush, "and poke it right open."

"Humph!" said Nimpo, "I think I see myself putting my thumbs into a horse's mouth!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Rush, scornfully.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FATE OF NIMPO'S DOLL.

"ANNA," said Nimpo, the next day, "you remember that cunning little girl at Sarah's?"

"Yes," said Anna. "You mean the one with the yellow flannel frock."

"Well, I've been thinking about her, and I'm going to give her my doll."

"What, your big one that your mother made?" asked Anna, aghast.

"Yes. I don't want it any more, and I most know she hasn't any."

"What'll your mother say?" asked Anna.

"Mother won't care. It's been lying in the attic ever so long, and I don't know as I can find her dress. Come over after school and help me fix her up, and we'll go out to Sarah's with it. Will you?"

"Yes, and maybe Sarah'll tell us another story," said Anna, eagerly.

After school the neglected doll was hunted up, and a droll looking object she was, with her face very dirty, and half the hair gone from her head. Her limbs were all there, for she was not one of your store dolls, whose legs and arms are held by one stitch. This doll was of home manufacture, and I'm afraid you young girls with your dolls of wax and bisque would turn up your nose at her, and call her a rag-baby.

I don't suppose you ever saw one of her kind, so I will tell you about her. Her body was cut and made, by Nimpo's mother, of stout cotton. Her arms were made of kid. Her head was about the size, and nearly the shape, of an ordinary sauce plate, made of cotton also, and ornamented on the face with the brightest of red lips and cheeks, and the bluest of eyes, all done in oil paint, and on the back, covered with a grand wig of real hair, which hung down her back in ringlets. Her head was covered with black to hide any shortcomings in the curls. When she came

in Nimpo's Christmas stocking, two or three years before, she was completely dressed, from her red morocco shoes, to a black silk dress and quilted hood; and every thing would come off, which was a rare virtue in those days.

It took so long to hunt up her clothes, that it was almost dark when Anna and Nimpo reached the log house in the woods. As they came near they heard singing and Nimpo whispered,

"Let's go up still. I guess Sarah's singing, and it's real fun to hear her. We can hardly ever get her to sing."

So they stole up to the door, and looked in. There sat Sarah on a low stool before the fire, rolling from side to side in a kind of ecstasy, beating time with her hands and singing to the most unearthly, wailing tune, these words,

"O come 'long, Moses, yo won't get lost,

Let my people go.

With a lighted can'l at yo breast,

Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Go an' tell ole Pharo fur to let my people go."

"Keep still!" whispered Nimpo, "there's lots more of it, it's real funny."

Sarah went on:

"O take y'r shoes frum off y'r feet,

Let my people go.

Walkin' in de golden street,

Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Go an' tell ole Pharo fur to let my people go."

Just then they heard the whole family returning from the woods, each one with an armful of wood. Sarah heard them too, and came out. She started when she saw the two girls.

"Lor! how ye scairt me! y'r ma done come home?"

"No," said Nimpo. "I came to bring my doll to the little girl I saw here.

"What! to Sabriny!" exclaimed Sarah, "won't she be tickled! Law! she never saw such a powerful fine doll, let alone ownin' on't herself."

By that time the family had come in, and the doll was handed from one to the other, and praised, till Nimpo felt as though she had done some he-

roic thing. As for the little Sabrina, as soon as she fairly got possession of the wonderful treasure, she disappeared in a dark corner of the room where she hugged and kissed it with as much affection as though it was one of the marvellous French dolls of our day.

"Sarah, won't you tell us a story before we go?" said Nimpo coaxingly.

"I'll show ye somethin' yo never saw, I reckon," said Sarah. "The day's work's all done put away. Mebby the chillen will show yo how we dance down Souf, whar we come from. Come, chillen, sing 'My ole Massa.'"

After some urging, the four older children stood up in the middle of the room, while the rest of the family with Nimpo and Anna, as spectators, sat around the edge.

"Yo sing, Sarah," said her sister. So Sarah began singing to one of their doleful airs, these words,

"My ole massa built a house, fifteen stories high,

An' ebery room within that house, was filled with chicken pie."

At this point the dancers, of whom there were two boys and two girls, locked arms in pairs, each boy and girl looking opposite ways, and whirled round and round while all sang this chorus—

“Hi diddle, O jump candy, jump candy, jump candy!”

Here they suddenly changed arms and danced the other way, singing—

“Hi diddle, O jump candy. Hi diddle O, diddle E!”

Then they stood in a row clasping hands, and all sang,

“Row, brothers, row,
I'm lookin' for a pretty little boy,
I'm lookin' for a pretty little boy,
To feed him on sugar an' tea.”

Then Sarah began again,

“My ole Massa went to town,
On a load o' peaches,
The horse run 'way 'n broke his cart,
Smash it all to pieces.”

Then they locked arms as before, and danced, and sang the same chorus over again.

Nimpo was perfectly delighted with the odd entertainment, but Anna looked as prim as though she had seen something dreadful.

"Now tell us one story! Just a little teenty taunty bit of a one," begged Nimpo.

"Wall, how yo young uns do tease a body," said Sarah. "Did yo ever har 'bout Ole Leonard's prayer?"

"Oh no! tell us," said Nimpo.

"Onct thar was a pore ole nigga," began Sarah, "an' he lived all 'lone by hisself in a miz'able cabin in the woods. An' he work hard, 'n never had nuff to eat I reckon. One night he was tired 'n hungry 'n he kneeled down to pray, 'n he prayed that 'de angel ob de Lord would come and take de soul ob Leonard dis yer night.' While he was a-prayin' out loud that-a-way, two wicked young fellers was a-goin' by, 'n they hars him, 'n says one, says he, 'Le's scare Ole Leonard.' So he c-r-e-p-t up to the do' very keerful, an' he guv three loud knocks.

'Who—who—who's dar?' says Leonard all in a trem'l.

Then the wicked feller spoke up slow an' solemn like,

'De angel ob de Lord!'

'Wh—wh—what de angel ob de Lord want?' said Ole Leonard, his teeth jist a-chatterin', he was that scairt.

'*De soul ob Leonard!*' says the young feller.

Puff! out went the can'l, into bed jumped Leonard, an' kivered up his head, lettin' out a yell as he went,

'*Ain't no Leonard hyer!*'"

"Is that all?" asked Nimpo after they had laughed at poor Leonard, "it's awful short."

"Laws a massy!" said Sarah with her face on a broad grin, "yo chillen'd set an' har stories tole till yo tuk root I reckon. Go long! it's mose night this very minute! an' Miss Primkins'll be a-worryin' 'bout yo."

"Humph! there's no danger of that," said Nimpo as she started to go—"she don't know we're here."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STOVE-PIPE HOLE IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

THE school-house was a long, two-story building. In one end of it was a boys' school, kept by Mr. Osgood, and in the other end the girls' school, kept by Miss Osgood—his sister.

The boys' school admitted boarders from abroad, and the whole second story of the building was used as a sleeping room for them.

In winter the girls' room was warmed by a big stove, the pipe of which went through the floor of the boys' sleeping room, and into the chimney from there. So in summer, when the stove was away, there was the stove-pipe hole looking down into the girls' room.

The seat under that hole, was both a delight and a torment to its owner. Sometimes as she

sat studying, a fine red apple or rosy peach would fall plump into her lap; occasionally a handful of flowers or bunch of wintergreen leaves would come instead; but oftenest of all, a tiny note would flutter down before her,—sometimes addressed to her, and sometimes to other girls.

This was the pleasure of the seat, but there was a disagreeable side too—as there is to most things.

Nimpo, who sat there at this time, would sometimes have a handful of burs dropped on to her head, or a few drops of water sprinkled on her neck, making her start, and look up to catch a glimpse of a laughing face and wicked eyes.

I should like to give you a specimen of the notes the boys wrote to the girls in those days. You'd hardly suspect your grave old fathers and uncles of such effusions as this, which is a literal copy of one, brown and worn with age, that Nimpo kept in a small box with other relics of those old days.

The young gentleman—aged fourteen—was just beginning Latin, as you see, and the note was directed thus:

To be put in a hole in Nimpo Rievor's blue tippet.

Inside it read thus:

Ego amo te. x-l-t-pipe. t-i-o-n shun. i-n-g, s-q-u-a-w
Squaw, Injun Squaw. of the rantom scootum, riball roball,
junification, table, nable, nation.

You don't know what all that stuff means? No more did Nimpo, but she thought the Latin was learned, and the rest mysterious, and anyway it was something to be kept among the relics.

You see how much better you boys of nowadays can write.

Besides this surreptitious correspondence through the stove-pipe hole, Nimpo usually kept up a furious correspondence with Anna Morris. You don't know what they wanted to write for—when they met every day? Nor do I—but they did. They had private and special names for each other, which no one knew till they “got mad,” and told. Then when they “made up,” they only had to take new names and begin again.

At this time Nimpo was “Delia,” and Anna was “Alicia,” and I'm tempted to give you one of

Alicia's notes, which came from the same little box of relics.

MY VERY DEAR DELIA,

it begins.

It is with great pleasure that I sit down to answer your kind note. Don't ask me to destroy—not your scribbles—but your notes, I must have some daily memento of my Delia's affection, though I well know it is not needful, for I know her devotion. I know but can not appreciate the interest you take in my welfare, and thanks amount to nothing only accept my most adoring love, and be sure that no earthly object shall ever dare to rival you. How true the saying that youth and beauty soon decay, it seems but yesterday that I was seated on a bench at Miss Mark's school, now we shall soon be old, and know no more the scenes of our youth, now so light and trifling. Recollections hurl themselves upon my memory, the earliest infancy of our acquaintance steals its own remembrance and leads the pathway for the thousand succeeding events which have transpired.

If poor Anna got beyond her depth along here, don't you sometimes? She little dreamed that she was writing for posterity. But to return to the little yellow note.

Now let the past gurgle away into oblivion, and sensations be richer and more redundant with ample satisfaction. Tea is ready and I must go. Let not my dearest Delia forget her adoring

ALICIA.

P. S.—I wear the key of my desk on my neck.

After all, the girls of thirty years ago were not so very different from you. I've seen school-girl notes within a year, that would do very well as companion pieces to this.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LOVE LETTER.

ONE day when Nimpo was busy, studying her geography, a note dropped from the stove-pipe hole on to the book before her. It was addressed to Nimpo, and in the corner "don't tell," and it was from the same young gentleman who wrote the first one.

Nimpo hastily hid it in her pocket, till she had a good chance to open it, when what was her amazement to read the following,

MY DEAREST NIMPO :

I love you so much I can hardly tell you how much I love you. Please do me the favor to marry me. I'll give you five hundred dollars if you will be my wife.

MASTER WILLIAM GAYLORD.

Nimpo was shocked! Love letters written in Latin and other mysterious tongues, and not

meaning any thing in particular, might do very well, but such a bold thing as this—in plain English too—was never heard of in that town. Willy Gaylord—who came from a far-off city—probably brought the fashion from home.

At recess Nimpo put her arm around Anna Morris's waist, and walked off, as indeed she always did, except during a temporary eclipse of their friendship.

Out of hearing of the girls, Nimpo first made Anna promise not to tell in the school-girl's most solemn oath—"Sure's I live and breathe and draw the breath of life," and then showed her the dreadful note.

Anna was more sentimental than Nimpo, and she was disposed to look at it as the beginning of a brilliant career of society life. She clasped her hands, and said tragically,

"Oh, my dearest, dearest Delia has got a lover!"

But Nimpo scornfully said,

"Fudge!—he's a goose! Lover! I guess so! Nothing but a school-boy—with light hair!

Umph! When *I* have a lover, Miss Anna Morris, you'll see a tall, dark—very dark—man, with hair and whiskers black as night, and magnificent eyes. There'll be something mysterious about him, so he can't come to see me in the daytime, and I shall lean out my window and talk to him at night. But that won't be for years yet—not till I'm seventeen at least."

"That's more interesting, I know," said Anna. "And that's the way they are in books; but here you have got a lover, and you can't help yourself."

"Humph! I'll soon cure *him*!" said Nimpo energetically.

"What'll you do?" asked Anna looking—in spite of herself—with somewhat of awe at the girl who had a lover.

"I don't know,—not speak to him I guess, and tear up his next note while he's looking," said Nimpo.

"That'll be a good way," said Anna, and that was the way decided on at last.

So when school was out at noon, Nimpo never looked towards the street where, out of the cor-

ner of her eye, she had seen Willy Gaylord waiting for her. And she went out of her usual way home with her arm fast locked in Anna's.

In the afternoon an anxious face peered down the stove-pipe hole. Then came a beautiful pear. It fell on Nimpo's lap, but though pears were her delight, and this one looked especially fine, she sacrificed it, with a pang, and let it roll off on to the other side of the room, where Mamy Smith picked it up.

Then came a note. This Nimpo took, and without looking up, deliberately tore into bits, as fine as she could, and then scattered them on the floor.

One faint exclamation of horror she heard from the stove-pipe hole, and then she heard no more, and that night Willy Gaylord didn't wait for her, and "all was over," Anna Morris said.

But all was not over, by any means! for Willy didn't take his cool rejection kindly. In fact he was just boiling over with rage, and racked his brain night and day for revenge. He soon hit on a plan to tease Nimpo. He boarded next door

to Mrs. Primkins, and he had a pet dog, an ugly, yellow creature, that Nimpo particularly disliked.

Willy went at once to work to teach this dog a new lesson. By means of bits of bread as bribes, and with much practice, Willy taught him in a few days so that he would come when called by a new name. Then all was ready, and he waited his chance. That evening he seated himself on the front steps, with the dog playing in the grass.

Waiting till Nimpo was walking by, he suddenly held out a piece of bread and began calling,

"Nimpo, Nimpo, Nimpo!"

Involuntarily Nimpo looked around.

"What do you want?" she said shortly.

"Who spoke to you?" he said in blunt boy style. "I was just calling my dog," and sure enough the ugly cur ran up and took the bread.

Nimpo went into Mrs. Primkins', almost too much vexed to speak.

"The mean old thing!" she said to herself, "just to spite me! I'll pay him off! I'll name Mrs. Primkins' rooster after him."

No sooner said than done. Providing herself with a handful of corn, Nimpo made a visit to the barnyard.

The fowl in question was of a valuable kind, and Mrs. Primkins had only one pair. The hen was just now very much engaged with a numerous family of children, and never went out of her small coop. So the lonesome rooster stalked around in solitary dignity.

Nimpo called him "Willy" and fed him, and every day she did it, till the intelligent fellow would cock his wise little head on one side and run at the name of Willy.

Then came Nimpo's turn. One evening when Willy lay on the grass under a tree, reading a book, Nimpo came out the side door, with a handful of crumbs (she had previously opened the barnyard gate).

"Willy, Willy, Willy!" she began, "here Willy, Willy!"

Willy Gaylord sprang up, only to see the gay rooster come running across the yard.

"Poor Willy! good little Willy!" said Nimpo

in a lower tone, "dò you want your supper? and how's Mrs. G—— to night? Do you feed her well, Willy? How soon will she be out, Willy?"

And so she went on, while the original Willy sat and stared open-mouthed.

"Now, Nimpo, that's too bad!" he said at last.

"It's no meaner than your naming your dog after me," said Nimpo.

"Yes, it is," said Willy, leaning on the fence, "because you named a whole family after me."

Nimpo laughed.

"Come, let's make up, Nimpo," he said coaxingly, "I won't write any more notes."

"Well," said Nimpo.

So that was the end of Nimpo's first love affair. That night Willy went down to the store and bought a tiny bit of a penknife—about half an inch long—with a hole in to put a string through. And the next morning, on the way to school he gave it to Nimpo as a peace-offering.

Nimpo strung it on a blue ribbon and wore it on her neck, and the next hard thing she did was to make him a pocket pin-cushion.

In those days girls had an idea that boys were in a chronic state of wanting a pin—as they were themselves—so on birthdays and at Christmas, every boy was well supplied with round flat things about as big as a silver half dollar, its edge gaily ornamented with pin heads.

Nimpo made hers heart-shape—she got Augusta Primkins to cut it out, and spent laborious hours trying to make small stitches around the edge. But she hated sewing, and though she won Mrs. Primkins' commendation for industry, nothing but a sense of duty carried her through the undertaking that lovely summer weather. Very glad she was, when the last pin was stuck in, and the whole thing handed over to the duly grateful Willy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREEN RIBBON.

"Nimpo," said Cousin Will one night, as she stopped at the store on her way home from school, "I received a letter from your father to-day; he wants me to go to Cleveland on business, and he says you may go, if you like, and stay all night at Mrs. Stuart's."

"Oh may I?" exclaimed Nimpo. "Won't that be splendid! I haven't seen Carrie Stuart for ever so long! When shall you go?"

"To-morrow morning—if I can get a team," answered Cousin Will.

"Why!—don't you go in the stage?" asked Nimpo.

"No. Your father says I'm to take a pair of horses and a buggy, so as to go out of the stage route and stop at B—— on a little business."

"Oh I'm so glad!" said Nimpo, "that's so much nicer than stage, and we'll be gone two whole days, won't we?"

"Yes," said Cousin Will.

Nimpo ran back to Anna Morris, to tell her the good news, and then went home and told Rush.

Rush didn't think the news was particularly good, he wanted to go himself. But Nimpo reminded him that he went on the last trip of the kind with father himself, and of course that was nicer than going with Cousin Will, and he had no reason to complain. So, being on the whole reasonable—considering—he submitted and said no more, though he drew long sighs whenever it was mentioned.

"What'll you wear?" asked Mrs. Primkins, when she heard the news.

"Oh my green and white delaine," said Nimpo, "it's the best for a travelling dress. But it won't look very well with my bonnet," she added presently, "for that is trimmed with blue to match my *barege*."

"That don't signify," said Mrs. Primkins; "besides you better wear your school hat, in case of rain, and it looks 'mazingly like it. Your best bonnet's a flimsy thing. I wonder your ma ever bought such an unpractical thing."

It was of delicate openwork material, very pretty for summer weather, but not just the thing for a two days' ride. But Nimpo couldn't endure the idea of going to Cleveland with a common school hat, so without saying any thing to Mrs. Primkins, she went down to the store and told Cousin Will her trouble.

"Oh that's nothing," said he. "You can have a green ribbon if you want, out of the store."

Nimpo went around to the show-case, and in a few minutes selected the one she would have,—a lovely bright green. Cousin Will cut some off, and she hid it in her pocket and went back to Mrs. Primkins'.

The trimming on bonnets was not quite so fussy in those days as that on your hats now, and Nimpo was sure that she could imitate the way the blue was put on, and make it look as well in

green, and after some trials she did succeed pretty well. There was a ribbon over the top, a bow on one side, and a few loops in the white lace in front—that was all.

The next morning she was up bright and early, with her delaine dress and her bonnet on, waiting for Cousin Will to drive up.

“Humph! you got your bonnet fixed up green after all, didn’t you?” said Mrs. Primkins.

“Yes,” said Nimpo, quietly, “I fixed it myself.”

“Well, it’s just a piece of vanity, that’s what it is!—as if two colors made any difference!”

“Oh, I couldn’t go to Carrie Stuart’s with a blue ribbon and a green dress,” said Nimpo, earnestly. “She has such nice things.”

“She’s no better for that,” said Mrs. Primkins. “My Augusty with her pink ribbon and blue dress is as good as she is, every bit and grain. I dare say now she’s as vain as a peacock.”

“Indeed she isn’t!” said Nimpo, tears coming to her eyes. “She’s just as sweet as she can be. There comes Will,” she added gladly, as a pair of horses drew up at the gate.

"Nimpo," called Cousin Will, "bring a big shawl to cover you up, for I'm afraid it will rain."

"Yes," said Mrs. Primkins, "and you better take my advice about your bonnet. That green ribbon'll wash out like a rag."

"Oh, I can't go there with my school hat," said Nimpo. "We've got a covered buggy and I guess it won't get wet, besides maybe it won't rain," and taking her shawl, she ran out.

In a minute she was packed into the buggy, the shawl laid under the seat in case of need, and away they went.

Nimpo was perfectly happy when she was riding, and Ohio is a very pretty state to ride about in. There are woods, and streams, and hills, rocky places, ravines, and many other attractions. Cousin Will was occupied with his own thoughts, and Nimpo leaned back on the seat and devoured every thing with her eyes, and enjoyed the ride, and the scenery, and all.

"I declare, I believe it *is* going to rain now," said Cousin Will, after they had gone about ten

miles. "I hope it'll be nothing but a shower, though."

"I like to ride in the rain," said Nimpo, "and be all covered and wrapped up, and hear it patter on the carriage-top, and see the horses all shiny."

"Oh, yes!" said Cousin Will, "that's all very well to you, who are inside, and dry, but how do you suppose the horses like it?"

"Oh, I like it to be out," said Nimpo; "only it's such a bother to change your clothes. If I was dressed in fur or feathers now, it would be splendid fun to be out in the rain."

"Humph!" said Cousin Will, "I wouldn't."

Now the drops began to come, and the wind rose and blew the dust furiously. The horses seemed uneasy, and the rain changed to hail. Cousin Will whipped up.

"We must hurry on and get into somebody's barn. I believe it's going to be a bad storm."

So it proved. The rain came down in torrents, and the wind blew so that Nimpo was afraid it would carry off the buggy-top. In a few minutes they came to the open gate of a farmyard, and

Cousin Will drove in without ceremony, stopping at last under a big shed, which amply covered horses, buggy, and all.

Then the farmer came out with an umbrella, and invited them into the house. They fastened the horses, gave them some hay, and then went in.

The host took Nimpo into a large pleasant kitchen where a middle-aged woman, with a white cap tied under her chin, sat by the window—mending stockings.

"Here, mother," said the man, "here's a poor child wet, and cold, and hungry I'll warrant. Can't you give her a bite to eat, and a dry rag to put on?"

"I guess I can," said the woman rising, but Nimpo hastened to say,

"Oh no, indeed!—I'm not wet, I can get dry here by the fire," and she drew near the large open fire-place, where a splendid big wood fire was burning.

"Well, you're not very wet," said the woman, "but I know you must be hungry."

"We expect to stop for dinner at Green's," said Nimpo, "don't trouble yourself about any thing to eat."

"Green's Tavern!" said the woman, "you won't get there this night, without I'm very much mistaken. What do you say, father?" turning to the farmer who just came in with Cousin Will, "ain't we in for a long spell o' rain?"

"'Twon't hold up agin this day," said the farmer, "as I've just been telling this young man; he might as well untackle the beasts, and settle down to stop over night with us."

"But I don't like to trouble you," said Cousin Will. "We must be near Green's, and we'll surely be able to get so far before long."

"Oh it's no trouble," said the woman, "we calkilate to accommodate any one who gets weather bound. We have a good deal of company, first and last."

"Well, Nimpo," said Cousin Will, "I suppose we might as well make ourselves comfortable then."

"Oh let's go on!" said Nimpo, in a low voice.

"I don't believe it'll rain long, and I do want to get to Cleveland to-night."

"Get to Cleveland!" said Cousin Will. "Nonsense, don't be silly. We can't go on in the rain—that's flat. I guess the farmer knows more about the weather than you."

With a sigh, which came near being a sob, Nimpo turned away, and slowly began to take off her bonnet.

"Come into the other room," said the woman kindly, "and take off your things."

She opened a door, and Nimpo followed her in.

CHAPTER XXV.

A NIGHT IN THE FARM-HOUSE.

THE other room was smaller than the kitchen, and there were two beds in it. They were great, fat, cushiony looking beds, with full white valance hanging to the floor, covered with patchwork quilts of wonderful patterns, and having two slinky looking pillows on each.

The posts of the bedsteads ran up nearly to the wall, and on them was a frame from which hung long white curtains, full enough to completely surround the beds, when drawn.

As for other furniture, there was little. Between the windows there was a square stand with two leaves to turn up, on which lay a newspaper and three books. A wooden rocking chair with a high feather cushion in it, another wooden chair or two, and a strip of rag carpeting in front of the

beds completed the assortment. Oh! I forgot two astonishing pictures, one of which was "Daniel in the Lion's Den," dressed in red coat and blue pantaloons, and the other "Abraham and Isaac"—in the same style of art.

All this Nimpo took in in one look, while the woman patted up the pillows, and changed the place of a chair or two.

"Now take your things right off, and make yourself to home," said she kindly. "I know it seems rather strange like at first, but I've got a daughter myself only a bit older than you, and I'll take good care of you. Lay your things on this bed here, and when you like you can come out into the kitchen. Is that young man your brother?"

"No, he's my cousin," said Nimpo.

"Oh! Well, come out when you get ready, I must get my dinner going," and she went out.

Nimpo threw off her bonnet and shawl, and took a good look at the droll things which that room held. After looking at the pictures awhile, she puzzled herself over the pattern of the patch-

work quilts, and then turned to the window, where a stiff green paper curtain was rolled half way up, and tied with a piece of tape. She looked out,—nothing but rain, rain, a dreary line of rail fence, the deserted road,—nothing else.

Then she turned to the stand, to see what she could find to read. The newspaper was an old number of the "New York Observer," yellow and ragged with age; of the books, one was the Bible, the second "Baxter's Saint's Rest."

Nimpo opened it, and turned over the leaves.

"It looks dry," she said, shutting it up, and taking up the third. That was "Pilgrim's Progress," and though Nimpo had read that interesting story a dozen times she clung to it as a last hope of being entertained. Sitting down in the rocking chair, she opened the book and began to read.

Now when Nimpo took a book, you might turn the house upside down, and unless you disturbed her she would not know it. She sat there and rocked, and read, till the kitchen door opened softly, a head was put in, quickly followed by

a body—as the farmer's wife saw what she was doing.

“Why, du tell! you been reading all this time? I thought you was taking a nap. Here's dinner smoking on the table, and your cousin asking for you.”

Nimpo closed the book, and followed her out.

“Wall, she wa'n't asleep after all,—reading a book, for all the world like my 'Mandy. She'd sit from morning to night, and read, and read.”

“What did you find so interesting?” asked the farmer pleasantly, as Nimpo took the seat pointed out to her.

“Only ‘Pilgrim's Progress,’” said Nimpo. “I've read it before, but I like it.”

“So do I,” said the man, “once in awhile of a Sunday, but I'm getting too old to read much.”

Nimpo looked at him with pity, and wondered what pleasure life could have, when one was too old to read. But soon she was attracted to the extraordinary meal before her.

In a big dish before the farmer, was a monstrous piece of boiled beef, surrounded by pota-

toes, turnips, beets, onions, cabbage, and in fact nearly every kind of vegetable that grew in the garden.

Nimpo turned away from that, only to see a large pan of cold baked pork and beans, at the other end of the table; the space between being filled up with smaller dishes of pickles, preserves, fried eggs, bread, apple sauce, and cheese, mixed in with pumpkin and apple pies, cake and gingerbread.

Nimpo instinctively looked around to see the army who should eat all this food, and was surprised to see no one but Cousin Will and herself, besides the farmer and his wife. And they four actually sat down to that tableful. Of course they could not do much towards emptying it, though the hospitable hosts urged every thing on them again and again.

After dinner, Nimpo returned to her book, and Cousin Will went out to the barn with the farmer, to look at his stock—he said—and see about the weather. The farmer's wife put on a big, checked apron, cleared the table, and washed

the dishes, and then sat down to her stocking mending.

The afternoon dragged slowly away. Nimpo finished the "Pilgrim's Progress," and was driven to read the advertisements in the old newspaper, and after awhile, to talk with her hostess. Like most uneducated people, she never knew when to stop, so she went on and told Nimpo nearly her whole history. Nimpo found it quite interesting—almost like a story-book, and she wondered how a woman who had seen so much, could live contentedly on a farm, miles away from every body.

When it came tea time the dinner was repeated, except as to the meat and vegetables, the place of which was filled by plates of raised biscuits, which looked as if they got to rising, and didn't know when to stop, for they were nearly as large as loaves of bread.

Nimpo couldn't eat half of one, especially as her plate was surrounded by a row of little plates and sauce dishes,—two deep,—each one holding something she wanted to eat.

Tea was over at last, the milk brought in, strained, and put away, the one tallow candle lighted, and at about half past seven they began to get ready for bed.

The question of bedrooms had been troubling Nimpo for some time, for so far as she could see there were but two rooms in the house, and how they were to sleep, she could not imagine.

But it was simple enough. When all was done for the night, the woman said to Nimpo,

"Come, dear, you and I'll go to bed, and give the men a chance." And she took the candle, and led the way to the other room.

"We haven't got but one bedroom yet," she went on, seeing Nimpo's surprise, "but you see when we draw these curtains, we're just the same as in another room. You and I'll take this bed, and leave the other for the men."

"But—" began Nimpo, who had never slept with a stranger in her life.

"Oh! I know," interrupted the woman, laughing, "it seems funny to you, it did to me at first,

but la!—it's nothing when you get used to it. Which side'll you have?"

"The back side," said poor Nimpo, who thought she would rather die than sleep with that woman.

However, there was nothing to do but submit. She dawdled around, unlacing her shoes, till the woman went to bed and drew the curtains, and then going around behind the bed, she just slipped off her dress, and laid down on the back side as far as she could get from her already half-asleep hostess.

In a few minutes she heard the farmer and Cousin Will came in, and pretty soon their bed creaked, and the light went out, and Nimpo thought she should lie awake and stare at the dark till morning, for she knew she couldn't sleep.

But she did, and before she knew it, it was broad daylight, and her bedfellow was gone.

After listening awhile, and hearing no sound, she cautiously peeped out, and saw the curtains of the other bed drawn back, and the clothes turned over the foot board. She knew then that she had the room to herself, and she hurried to

slip on her dress before any one should come in. She finished dressing more leisurely, and went out.

Breakfast was nearly ready, and Nimpo went at once to the door, to see about the weather. She couldn't stay there another day.

The rain had stopped, but it was cloudy yet. However, Cousin Will came in just then and told her they must hurry through breakfast, and try and get to Cleveland before it rained again.

So before long the horses came up, and Nimpo bade the farmer's wife good-by, and climbed into the buggy.

"Stop agin sometime," she said hospitably.

"Thank you," said Nimpo, but when they reached the road, they had a great laugh about the queer little farm-house, its big dinners and its odd way.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GREEN RIBBON MAKES TROUBLE.

For some hours the rain held off, but at last it came. They were some miles from a house, and about as near Cleveland as anywhere, so Cousin Will resolved to push on. The rain was in their face, and, though not violent, was a steady pour, and the wind blew it in on to them, so that before they saw the spires of the city, they were soaked through.

Poor Nimpo's light bonnet gave out the first thing, and weakly flatted down on to her head, and the treacherous ribbon wept green tears all over the wreck, down on to Nimpo's face, dropping at last on the light shawl she wore.

"Goodness! Nimpo!" said Cousin Will, happening to look at her just as they were going

into Cleveland, "you look like a green ghost," and he began to laugh, and laughed, and laughed, as though he could never stop.

Nimpo saw nothing to laugh at.

"Well, I think it's real mean to laugh at me," said she, mingling her tears with the green stream. "How I'll look to go to Carrie Stuart's! Oh I can't go!"

"You'll have to," said Cousin Will, laughing again.

But now Nimpo was crying so hard that he stopped his rather hard-hearted laugh, and tried to console her.

"You can wipe it off Nimpo, and of course they'll see how it is, and Mrs. Stuart'll fix you up somehow."

But being fixed up by the fashionable and elegant Mrs. Stuart, of whom Nimpo was in great awe, was a terrible thought to her, and she wasn't much consoled.

However she tried to stop crying, and wiped her face with her handkerchief, which came off green; but it was a very unhappy and tearful

girl that Cousin Will handed out at Mrs. Stuart's door. The servant who answered the bell seemed inclined to refuse the trust, till Will said—

“Tell Mrs. Stuart it's Miss Nimpo Rievor, and I'll come for her in the morning.”

“Oh call Carrie, please,” begged Nimpo, as the man was about starting off, leaving her in the hall.

“Miss Carrie's out of town,” was the reply.

That gave the last blow to Nimpo's self-control, she sank into a chair, overcome with mortification and disappointment. She buried her face in her arms, and wished she could die.

But she didn't die. Of course not! Mrs. Stuart came out, dressed in a beautiful light silk dress, with flowers in her hair.

At first she did not know Nimpo, and she asked kindly,

“Did you want to see me, little girl?”

Nimpo looked up.

“Don't you know me?” she said, between her sobs. “I'm Nimpo Rievor, and I came to stay with Carrie all night.”

"Dear me! So you are Nimpo! I'm very glad to see you, but Carrie'll be so sorry. She's out of town for a week,—gone to her grandfather's. You've been out in the rain," she went on, for Nimpo had buried her face again, "but don't feel so bad about it—if that is all. Is any thing else the matter?"

"No," sobbed Nimpo, "only I look so, and I wanted to see Carrie."

"Well, never mind your looks, we'll soon have you fixed up. I'm going out to dinner myself, but I'll give you to Susan—you remember Susan—and she'll soon make you comfortable with some of Carrie's clothes, while yours get dry, and then you can amuse yourself in the library—I remember what a little book-worm you are—till you want to go to bed. William—" she turned to the amazed servant, "send Susan here."

Susan came, and Nimpo was handed over to her with proper directions, and in a short time she had taken a warm bath, had her tea and was dressed in some clean clothes of Carrie's, while Susan took hers down to the kitchen to be dried.

Great as was her disappointment to find Carrie gone, this was a wonderful evening for her, and one she never forgot. She stole down into the library where it was light and pleasant, and there were four walls nearly covered with books, from which to choose.

The very neighborhood of books was delightful to this hungry book-lover, and she never knew a perfume so delicious as the smell of a fresh new volume.

The first hour she spent in reading names on the outside, and taking a peep now and then into one whose title invited search. But when she came to the shelves where Carrie had her books, she soon found a marvellous volume of travels, and after glancing over it, she went to a comfortable easy chair, where she curled herself up, and opened the book.

She had sailed half round the world, seen a thousand wonders, and had wonderful adventures, before she heard the door open, and saw Mrs. Stuart.

"Well, well! Reading here this time of night!

I wonder if you'd ever get tired," she said pleasantly.

Nimpo looked up.

"I guess not. Is it late?"

"Why, it's twelve o'clock," said Mrs. Stuart, "you ought to have been abed hours ago."

"O I couldn't go to bed, I wanted to read this book, and I've got to go home in the morning."

"I think not," said Mrs. Stuart. "I've made a plan to keep you awhile, and send for Carrie."

But when Nimpo told her that her mother was away, and how she came, Mrs. Stuart saw that she must go, so she packed her off to bed.

When Cousin Will drove up in the morning, Nimpo came out neatly fixed up with a bonnet of Carrie's and her own dried shawl and dress. Mrs. Stuart came to the door with her, and told Will that it was her special request that Nimpo should come and stay a week when her mother came home, and Cousin Will said he would remember and give the invitation to Mrs. Rievor, and Nimpo kissed Mrs. Stuart, and thanked her for the precious book of travels which she had

given her to finish at home,—and they drove off.

“Well, Nimpo,” said Cousin Will, “you didn’t have such a dreadful time after all.”

“Oh I had a splendid time!” said Nimpo, “only Carrie wasn’t home.”

The day turned out very pleasant, and they took dinner at Green’s, where they had another such a funny meal as at the farmer’s; for after all, Green’s was only a farm-house with a sign stuck out.

Though the sun shone, the mud was dreadful,—regular Ohio mud, yellow and clayey,—and the horses walked up and down the long hills, and so it was nearly dark when they drove into the village.

Nimpo found Rush and Robbie watching for her. Mrs. Primkins smiled grimly when she saw the new bonnet.

“Found I was right about the green ribbon, didn’t you now?” she said.

“The color did come out some,” answered Nimpo, shortly.

"Wall, what become of the bonnet anyway?" was the next question.

"I don't know, burnt up I guess; Susan took it," answered Nimpo.

"Wall, wall! you're a careless huzzy. I haven't a doubt that a little stiffnin' 'd make that bonnet 's good 's new, but that's the way with young ones. So's they have a good time, no matter how much trouble and expense they make."

This greeting after the pleasant evening at Mrs. Stuart's, and her lovely day's ride, grated on Nimpo's nerves severely, and she found it hard work not to talk back. But Robbie's welcome, and evident delight at having her back, made up for every thing else.

When she was undressing him, Nimpo gave him a good hugging.

"Who undressed you when I was gone?" she asked.

"Rush," said Robbie; "but he can't unscramble shoe strings—he breaks 'em."

"Well," said Nimpo, "he sha'n't undress you any more, you're my boy again now."

"I ain't your boy," said Robbie earnestly. "I'm mamma's boy, I growed just for her."

"Well, you'll be mine till she comes home, won't you?" asked Nimpo.

"Yes," said Robbie, "I'll jest p'etend be your boy."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WINDMILL STORE.

"NIMPO," exclaimed Rush one day, coming in from school, "it's windmill time! Johnny Stevens had one this morning,—let's have our store again."

"Well," said Nimpo, "if Anna Morris'll be in partnership with us, I will."

"Oh she will, I know!" said Rush eagerly. "I'll go over now and ask her."

"No, I'll see her at school this afternoon, and that'll be time. We can't do any thing till after school anyway."

Rush was so excited he could hardly eat his dinner, and as soon as that meal was over he rushed off to begin his arrangements.

Now in that little village, there came regularly, not only kite time, and top time, and marble time,

and jumping rope time, but also windmill time, when every child carried a whirling windmill—pinwheel perhaps you call them. Not every one could make them well, and not any one had so fine a stock of colored papers as Nimpo. So that all she made were very choice, and eagerly sought after.

The year before my story, she and Rush had much fun, and made quite a little pile of pennies by selling them.

At recess she talked it over with Anna, and at night they were ready to begin.

"I'll get the boards, and rig up the store," said Rush, as they hurried home from school.

"Oh no!" said Nimpo, "we won't let any body know till we get lots of things made, because you know there'll be a rush at first, and we want it to look real pretty too."

"Oh, of course!" said Anna. "I can make nice fly-boxes, too."

"Yes, and fish noses," said Rush.

"And little crosses," added Nimpo. "But in school this afternoon, I wrote a paper for us

all to sign,—so we won't have any trouble you know."

"Let's see it," said Anna.

"Well, come in, on to the front steps," said Nimpo, for they had just reached the door, "and I'll read it."

They all sat down on the steps, and Nimpo took from her book a half sheet of foolscap paper, folded long—like a deed, or other legal document.

On the outside was written,

Articles of agreement drawn up by Nimpo Rievor, and agreed to by Anna Morris, and Rush Rievor.

"But perhaps we won't agree," said Rush.

"Wait till I read them," said Nimpo beginning—

Name of firm to be Rievor and Morris—

because there's two of us.

RULES OF THE FIRM.

1st. That each member of the firm must do its half or 3d according to the number of parties in said firm.

- 2d. That each must do their allotted work faithfully.
- 3d. That Rush M. Rievor is to make all sticks cut off all heads of pins, and put them in said sticks.
- 4th. That Nimpo Rievor is to cut all things out, and put them on said sticks.
- 5th. That Anna B. Morris is to help her.
- 6th. That each member of the firm is to receive theyr just share of the profits.
- 7th. That each member of the firm is to spend a certain time agreed upon in making or selling, and as much time as they can spare otherwise.
- 8th. That if there is any disagreement that can not be settled, that the firm must dissolve immediately, each receiving an equal share of the store property.
- 9th. That each week the profits shall be divided.

Signed, NIMPO RIEVOR.

"That's fair," said Anna; "I'll sign it," and she took a pencil from her pocket, and wrote her name under Nimpo's.

"It don't tell who shall furnish paper," said Rush, as he wrote his name, under Anna's.

"Why, I'll have to furnish colored paper of course," said Nimpo, "and Anna can furnish white paper for fly-boxes and such things, and you, Rush, must furnish sticks."

"Who'll get the pins?" asked Rush.

"Oh, all of us," said Nimpo.

"Let's hunt now," said Rush, starting up and running around to the back door, where he could get in. Nimpo and Anna followed, and then commenced an energetic hunt. The way that bureaus and sofas were pulled out from the wall, bedsteads and washstands shoved out of the way (and left so), would have driven a housekeeper crazy. Upstairs, down-stairs, in the cracks, at the edge of the carpets, under the edge of oil-cloth and zinc, every corner and crevice of that house was searched. The result was a goodly pile of pins, some bent and discouraged by their experience of life, some worn smooth and brassy by long and faithful service, and some bright and straight as when they came from the paper.

Perhaps you wonder why they did not go to their mother's big brick pin-cushion, and help themselves; but that's another thing I must tell you about the windmill business. At first they did so, and when they had a box full of pins and needles,—for this trade was carried on by pins and

not by pennies,—they took them to mother to buy. They found out how many pins go to a paper, and they charged her full price for them, just as though they were all fresh and new.

Well, when the pins got so numerous that Mrs. Rievor found she too was in the business, she began to impose conditions. First, that every pin must be straight, and every needle have a point and an eye; and secondly, that they must find the pins for their outfit, themselves.

When they had collected enough pins to begin with, Rush started for the barn to find a piece of soft wood, Anna went home for white paper, and to search their house for pins, and Nimpo went to her bureau drawers to rummage for paper.

You girls whose fathers keep dry-goods stores, won't need to be told where she got her bright papers, and droll little ribbons; but for the benefit of others I will tell, that when her father had new goods come, he opened them at night, after the store was closed, and Nimpo and her mother always went down to see the things,—Mrs. Rievor to select what she wanted, and Nimpo to secure

the ribbons and papers that come wrapped around the rolls of linen, and the pretty gilt pictures and figures that are pasted on the Swiss muslins.

No other girl had a claim at the store, so Nimpo had them all, and very choice she was of them too.

Their common use was to furnish clothing for her paper dolls. She never dreamed of a bought paper doll, with pretty face and nice clothes—such as you can buy for a few cents. Far from it! Her dolls she cut herself from pasteboard, their faces she made with a pencil, and their clothes she cut from the colored papers. She had a big boxful too, and enjoyed them much more than I ever saw any of you youngsters enjoy your lovely bought ones.

Well, to go back to the windmills. On extra occasions like the present, Nimpo would bring out her stock of treasures, and use some of them for windmills.

Anna and Rush returned, and business began in earnest. Rush soon had a pile of small round sticks ready, and Nimpo had selected the papers

she was willing to use, while Anna—who could print very well—was preparing signs.

The largest sign she made of a whole sheet of foolscap paper, spread open, and tacked on a board. It read thus—

RIEVOR & MORRIS.

WINDMILL & DART & FIZIMAJIG STORE.

This large sign was intended to be stuck up on the gate, to attract passers by. For smaller signs to put up over the counter, she made two.

*Every thing to be sold strictly for
Pins and Needles.*

*Every Needle must have a point and an eye, and
not be very rusty. Pins must be straight
and have their heads on.*

When Rush had enough sticks ready, he went to work on the pins. First he hunted up an old pair of shears, and cut off all the heads. Then sharpening the ends of about half the sticks as

you sharpen a lead pencil, he drove a pin into each sharp stick till it was firm, with the point out. But I don't suppose I need tell you how to make darts, no doubt you have made dozens of them yourself.

For the windmills he simply made the sticks smooth, about as long and as large as a lead pencil.

Meanwhile Nimpo had cut out a lot of square papers, of different sizes and colors, and variously ornamented with edges cut in scallops or points, or with gay little stars or dots pasted on, or an overlying openwork pattern of a different color.

When Anna had finished the signs, she went to work putting the papers on the sticks. As fast as the darts were done, they were thrown across the room and stuck into a door, to see how they would go.

The next day was Saturday, and by nine o'clock in the morning, the store was open. Rush made a counter by putting a board across two barrels, under the front piazza. The darts made a gay show against the house, behind the counter, the

windmills stuck through a sort of rack, so as not to injure the paper, and the other little things arranged on the counter. The signs were put up, and all was ready.

First came in one boy, to see what was going on, then he ran home for pins, and told the news to every one he met, they too went home for pins, and in fifteen minutes the rush began.

Now Nimpo and Rush and Anna were all as busy as they could be, waiting on the eager buyers, testing the qualities of the windmills and darts, showing how the fly-boxes opened, and how the fish noses could be made to work.

Then came grave consultations over the pins and needles offered. Many were bent too much, —mother would forgive a tiny bend,—many of the needles had outlived their usefulness, and the whole firm had a private consultation behind the front steps, on the value of a darning needle, brought by Mamy Smith.

Pins were the standard. Articles were marked, 3, 5, 10, 12, and so on, meaning so many pins. Each needle was worth eight pins, and—as they

agreed—each darning needle was worth twenty pins. When sold to mother, twenty-five pins were worth a cent, so you see it was easy to count up gains.

All the morning while they were so busy, every thing went off pleasantly—as it generally does with busy people—and the eighth proviso of the terms of agreement was null and void. (We may as well get used to legal terms, you know.)

By noon nearly all the stock was sold, and the store had to be shut up to replenish. That's the disadvantage of having but one set of hands to manufacture, and to sell. Moreover nearly all the village children were supplied, and it was just as well to have a rest, till they had lost or broken the things, and wanted more.

The rest of the stock, very small, was taken into the house, and they all went to dinner. After that meal, they came back, but found they were rather tired, so they decided not to open again that day. They counted their pins, and found two hundred and twenty, nearly nine cents worth, and there were needles enough to be worth

three cents more. They felt that they had done business enough for one day, and could afford to retire.

"Shall we divide the pins now?" asked Nimpo.

"Let's wait till your mother pays for them, and divide the money," said Anna.

"Ho! she won't buy your pins!" said Rush bluntly.

"Won't your mother buy them?" asked Nimpo.

"No," said Anna, "she said she didn't want all the neighbor's old pins."

"No more does my mother," said Nimpo, a little nettled. "She buys them to please us. She has a whole package of papers of pins on her closet shelf.

"A whole package!" said Anna a little incredulously, for her mother never bought more than one paper at a time.

"Don't you believe it?" asked Rush fiercely.

"Oh I suppose it's so, of course, if you say so," said Anna rather sneeringly.

"I can show it to you in a minute," said Nimpo, now very much provoked.

She hastily went into the closet, stepped up on a chair and reached down the package. It had but one paper taken out and Anna was quite impressed when Nimpo set it down before her on the table.

"There, Miss Anna Morris!" said Rush, "do you think *our* mother wants to buy the neighbor's old pins? She just does it to please *us*."

"Oh I didn't mean any thing," said Anna hastily, for she saw the rising storm in Nimpo's face, and she never had much fun when she and Nimpo were "mad." "Of course I know your mother has enough pins. I was only joking."

"Well," said Nimpo somewhat mollified, "you can leave your pins if you want to. I presume mother'll be willing to buy them all. But I don't want to have a store any longer."

"Nor I," said Rush. "I'm tired of it."

"Well then, let's dissolve," and dissolve they did at once, dividing the few remaining windmills and darts, but leaving the pins in one box together, to wait Mrs. Rievor's return.

The signs were taken down, but the counter

was forgotten, and there it stood till Sarah came to clear up, when she whisked it into the woodshed in short order.

Thus ended the windmill and dart business for the season.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BUILDING A LOG HOUSE.

"P," said Rush the next Monday, "don't let's go to school to-day, let's go down home and play log house."

"Oh I don't want to," said Nimpo, who thought she was too old to play log house.

"Oh yes!" urged Rush, "pretty soon the wood'll be all split up, and then we can't. You want to go, don't you, Robbie?"

"Oh yes!" shouted Robbie, jumping around in delight at the prospect.

"Come, Nimp," said Rush, "we'll have real fun. I'll go to the store for some candy, and we can get raisins and things out of the store-room."

Nimpo hesitated. She hadn't played log house since she was twelve years old—nearly a year—because she thought it too childish.

"Come, Nimp, do," Rush teased, "you may have my little chair, and be the mother."

This offer was too tempting, and Nimpo yielded, slowly.

"Well—I don't care—I'll go," she said at last.

"Let's take the kitties," said Rush.

"Of course," answered Nimpo.

The kittens were caught, and in a few minutes the children were all off.

"I wonder what's in the wind now!" thought Mrs. Primkins, as she saw them go down the street. "Some new mischief, I'll be bound. If them young ones ain't the beater for scrapes I ever see! They're chock full of mischief as an egg is of meat, every bit and grain. I'm mighty glad their ma's coming home next week," and she turned back to her wash tub.

Now that Nimpo had really given up and decided to play, she entered into it with great spirit, for this game—with the help of her vivid imagination—had a delicious spice of picnicking and camping out, and all the delightful wild adventures she had read of.

By the time she had the house unlocked, and the things she thought they would want selected from the store-room, Rush hurried in from the store, shouting, "I've got three whole sticks! I told Cousin Will we were going to build a house, and some maple sugar!"

"Oh goody!" cried Robbie.

The treasures were safely deposited, and then they went out to begin the house. Across the back end of the yard, was a long wood-pile, piled up in the spring to get dry and nice for the next winter's burning. At one end of the pile Old Lisles had commenced sawing, for it was customary to have it all sawed and split, and piled in the wood-shed before fall.

He had a big pile sawed, but not any split yet, and it was of these short chunks that Rush and Nimpo prepared to build the house.

"Where shall we build it?" asked Rush, who was unusually amiable, for this was the first time in a year that he had succeeded in coaxing Nimpo to play.

"Over here under the apple-tree will be nice

and shady," said Nimpo, "and we can play it is in the woods."

"That'll be too far to carry the sticks," said Rush, "besides if we make it in this corner by the wood-pile, we'll only have two sides to build. The pile will make one side, and the fence another."

"So it will," said Nimpo, seeing these important advantages. "Well, we'll have it there," and they began at once to bring the logs.

It took about twenty minutes to build the mansion, for it wasn't very large. In fact, when done, it was about four feet square inside, and it was a tight squeeze to get a small table and three children in.

The sticks were piled up on two sides, just as in a regular wood-pile, a place was left for a door, and Nimpo went into the house to get something for a roof.

When their mother was home, she had an old shawl that she let them take for a roof, but Nimpo couldn't find that one, so she hunted around and found another shawl.

"She wears this," said Nimpo to herself. "But we won't hurt it any, and she won't care I guess."

So she took it.

The shawl was spread over the rough walls, fastened by a stick of wood at each corner, and the house was done.

"Now I'll make the fire-place," said Rush, "while you get the kettles and things."

While Nimpo went to the house for a frying-pan and a tin sauce-pan to make tea, Rush dug a hole in the ground outside the house, put four bricks for the sides, and over one end stood an old piece of stove-pipe. Into this droll fire-place he piled chips and bits of paper, sent Robbie into the house for a match, and at last had his fire lighted. The pipe made a draught, and it roared away in the most satisfactory manner.

Now Nimpo appeared with the things; first she handed out of her apron three or four potatoes, which Rush at once buried in a hole he had made on purpose, under the fire. Then the frying-pan was set on top of the bricks, and a piece of butter put in it.

"Where are the eggs?" asked Rush.

"In the kitchen," said Nimpo. "You get them while I set the table,—and some salt!" she called out as he ran off.

Nimpo had a small stand, which had been made for her when she was a very little girl. It was about as high as the seat of a chair, and was stained in exaggerated imitation of mahogany. It was the delight of her heart, and always stood by her bed. On occasions of building log houses, she had heretofore been too choice of her stand to bring it out, but to give extra glory to this time, she resolved to have it. So she went upstairs and brought it down. At the door she met Rush with a dish of eggs.

"Why, Nimpo!" he exclaimed in surprise, "are you going to take out your little table?"

"Yes," said Nimpo. "We'll have it splendid this time, and I've found a table-cloth too."

"Jolly, ain't that grand!" he said.

When they got to the stove they found the butter all burnt up and a strong smell of burning grease.

"Oh, dear, this'll have to be washed out!" said Rush, taking off the frying-pan.

"Well, you wash it, I haven't time," said Nimpo, busily spreading the table.

Perhaps you have noticed that when you have coaxed and teased one to join your play, that one feels a perfect right to dictate and order about. Well, just so Nimpo did, but Rush was glad to get her to play on any terms,—for it wasn't a bit of fun alone,—so he meekly obeyed her orders, washed out the frying-pan as well as he could, not too well either, put in a fresh piece of butter, and went on to fry the eggs.

There was, it must be admitted, a sort of sameness to the meals in the log house, because of the limited capacity of the stove. They always consisted of fried eggs, baked potatoes, tea, and any thing extra that they could get. The potatoes were baking, and the eggs sizzling in the pan, before any one thought of the tea.

"Oh Nimpo!" Rush called, "I forgot the tea. Won't you fix it? I can't leave the eggs, they'll all burn up."

Nimpo left the table, filled the sauce-pan with water—cold of course—put in a small handful of tea, and stood it on the stove behind the eggs.

For table-cloth she had brought out one of her mother's nice large damask towels, and she now had the table ready. She had left her set of china at Mrs. Primkins', but with sauce plates for plates, and egg glasses for goblets, she managed to make a pretty table. Just as she got the tea on the stove, Rush said the eggs were done. To be sure the potatoes were hard as bricks yet, and the tea not beginning to be warm, but that was no matter—the eggs could wait. As a matter of fact they always had to wait, for cooking them was the most fascinating part of the dinner-getting, and of course was sure to be done first.

After a good deal of trouble, and many new fires, Rush thought the dinner would do to take up. The tea was not yet boiled, but Nimpo said it would do—she didn't care much for tea anyway. The potatoes were dragged out from under the fire, very black, and covered with ashes, but

soft—if they were squeezed—and Rush said they would mash soft anyway.

So every thing was taken up, and put on the crowded little table, and Robbie was called from the garden, where he was digging a deep hole, “to fill full of water and sail his boat,” he said.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TAKING DINNER IN THE LOG HOUSE.

ROBBIE, being the smallest, was squeezed in to the back of the table. Nimpo took the seat of honor at the tea board, where stood Rush's little chair, while Rush sat on a square chunk of wood at the other end. He served eggs and potatoes, while Nimpo presided over tea, candy, raisins, and cinnamon, sticks of which stood up in mother's spoon glass, like celery.

This was very rude housekeeping, but I can tell you there was nothing rude about the manners. Every thing had to be done in the most elegant way. They called each other Mrs. Poulton, and Mr. Cady, and Robbie, Master Adolphus,—names which they always assumed on ceremonious occasions like the present. The curious viands were served in great style, and they spent a delightful

hour disposing of them, and conversing in grown-up style about their friends and their families, each one having invented numerous relatives for the occasion.

After dinner they went to play on the hay, as a rest from the labors of building a house and cooking dinner and sustaining grown-up characters so long.

Nimpo got another book,—an odd volume of “The Lady of the Manor,”—and was lying by the window on the sweet hay, deep in the woes of some unfortunate Clementina or Isabella, when Robbie called out from the door that it was raining.

She remembered her mother’s shawl on the roof of their house, and she sprang up. Sure enough, it was sprinkling fast. She ran out, and snatched the shawl off, but alas! it caught on a sharp stick and tore—a dreadful three-cornered hole.

“There!” cried Rush, who was trying to make the fire burn again. “Now you’ve done it! What’ll mother say?”

"Oh dear! I don't know," said Nimpo sorrowfully. "How unlucky I am! it's too bad!" and she went slowly into the house.

Then it began to rain so hard that Robbie and Rush came running in, and Nimpo never thought of the dishes, her book, her stand, and her mother's damask towel.

When the rain was over, it was nearly night and they locked up the house and went back to Mrs. Primkins'.

"Oh Rush," exclaimed Nimpo, stopping on the stairs, as they were on their way up to bed, "we left all those things out! the dishes and frying-pan—"

"They won't hurt," said Rush carelessly.

"Oh! but mother's towel—" Nimpo went on.

"Rain won't hurt that, and I don't believe any body'll steal it," said Rush.

"Oh dear!" Nimpo burst out excitedly, "and my table! Oh I've a good mind to go down now and take it in."

"I wouldn't," said Rush, going on up-stairs, "it won't hurt any."

"But suppose some one should carry it off!" wailed Nimpo. "Won't you go with me, Rush?"

"Oh no, I don't want to," said Rush; "besides I've got my shoes off, and Mrs. Primkins has locked up the house."

That was true, and slowly and sadly Nimpo went on to bed.

The first thing in the morning she ran down to the house, to see if her precious table was safe. Dire was the confusion in the deserted, roofless log house. It looked as though a tornado had swept through it. The dishes were all on the ground, and an egg glass was broken. The varnish on the poor little table had turned white in spots. The unfortunate "Lady of the Manor" lying wide open on Rush's chair, was soaked through, and the cover swelled up and half off. The towel was altogether missing.

Poor Nimpo stood aghast.

"I had no business to take the towel," she said, "mother never lets me, and how stupid of me to leave the book! It serves me right that my dear little table is spoilt! Oh dear, how much trouble

I have had since mother went away! I do wonder if I'm always so careless," and she sat down on the steps to think.

"I wonder if I do give mother so much trouble as Mrs. Primkins says I do, and I wonder if it's because she's gone that I get into so many scrapes!—seems to me I never had so many accidents in my life."

After some moments of serious thought, Nimpo arose and prepared to remove the wreck of their play. The dishes she gathered up and carried into the house, and the frying-pan—all rusted—and the unfortunate little table. And at last, half way to the house she found what was left of the towel. It was a mere ruin, torn and bitten.

"Oh dear," she cried, as she held it up and saw its condition, "Mrs. Wilson's puppy must have got it, and he pulled it off and broke the dishes."

Mrs. Wilson, who lived in the next house, had a half-grown Newfoundland dog, which was very fond of playing with clothes, shoes, or any thing of the kind. He would even jump up and seize

the clothes on the line, and had been troublesome all summer.

Very sadly Nimpo cleared up the things, and went off to school.

"Nimpo," said Anna that afternoon at recess, "you're going to Miss More's after school, ain't you?"

"I suppose so," said Nimpo, rather crossly, "but I don't want to go a bit."

Miss More was their Sunday-school teacher, and the Sunday before had invited her class to a prayer-meeting in her room.

"Oh Nimpo!" said Anna, with her mouth drawn down at the corners in a prim way, "it's very wicked to talk so; Miss More said so."

"Well, I suppose it is," said Nimpo, who did not feel very happy yet. "I know I'm awful wicked, but I can't bear to go to that old prayer-meeting—so there! I suppose I'll have to go though, or she'll talk to me awfully."

After school therefore, the girls went up to Miss More's room, which was in the third story of the "Ladies' Hall."

There were half a dozen girls there, and after some reading from the Bible, Miss More knelt down to pray.

Nimpo had a chair by the window, and—feeling very much out of harmony with every thing—was, I'm sorry to say, looking out of the window.

Before long a man came into the street, and looking up to her, began the most singular gestures. He threw his arms about, he pointed to the top of the house, he seemed to be wildly shouting to her to do something.

Nimpo thought he was crazy, but soon she heard a word that fairly froze the blood in her veins. The word was "Fire!"—"The house is on fire!"

Then his conduct was explained, and Nimpo's only thought was that it was a judgment on her because of her wickedness. She did not know what to do either. She couldn't bear to get up and speak. But others heard, they got up, Nimpo rushed to the door, and forgetting every thing in her fright, she flew down-stairs—she never

knew how—and never paused till she stood on the street.

Then she saw that the flames were bursting out of the roof, and a wild scene of confusion began, as there often will in a small town where there are no fire-engines.

The whole world seemed to have gone suddenly crazy. Windows were burst out, and men pitched out furniture, bureaus, looking-glasses, chairs, and trunks, that of course were smashed by the fall, and the same men would bring down, with the greatest care, mattresses, bundles of clothes, and such things, that might have been thrown out without injury.

One man—kind soul—went to the milk-room, and brought out one after another, ten pans of milk, and set them carefully on the grass, where in five minutes, they were full of soot and dust, drunk by dogs, and stumbled over and spilled.

The young ladies who roomed there were as wild as the rest, and in fact such a panic reigned that Nimpo ran home, though it was a quarter of

a mile off, and began to pack her treasures into her trunk, ready to be moved.

While she was doing that the fire was put out; but not for years, till Nimpo grew older and wiser, could she get over the idea that her dreadful wickedness in not wanting to go to the prayer-meeting, was the sole cause of the fire.

CHAPTER XXX.

NIMPO'S BRIGHT IDEA.

THAT night, after the fire was out, and the furniture—what was left of it—had been carried back, and people had come to their senses, and gone home to their tea, Nimpo received a letter from her father.

Rush eagerly leaned over her shoulder as she read it aloud:

MY DEAR LITTLE DAUGHTER: I suppose you think it is about time we came home. So do we, and we hope to start in a day or two—

“Oh, goody!” shouted Rush. Nimpo fairly danced for joy, waving the letter like a banner in her hand. Then she hugged Robbie, and told him mother was coming, and settled down to finish the letter:

I had occasion yesterday to go down Maiden Lane, and I thought how pleased you would be to be with me. Maiden Lane is a narrow street running out of Broadway. Here are located various stores filled with wonderful things. Whips and tops and balls, that would delight Rush and Robbie beyond measure. Walking-canes that can be changed into chairs in two minutes, and large wax dolls with eyes which can be opened or closed at pleasure,—

“Oh dear!” sighed Nimpo. “I wish—” Then she went on:

which, of course, a young lady almost in her “teens” would not want.

Nimpo drew a long sigh.

I saw rocking-horses large enough for a boy of ten to ride on,—

“Oh, I *hope* he'll bring me one!” said Rush, fervently.

and boats with sails that can be spread by pulling a string.

“Oh, I'd rather have the boat!” interrupted Rush again.

“Do let me finish the letter,” said Nimpo, reading:

But I'll tell you all about these and many other things when I return. Your mother is very well, and sends word to have Sarah notified of our return. Be a good girl, and mind Mrs. Primkins.

"Humph!" said Nimpo.

YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER.

The first thing that Nimpo did, after reading the letter over twice, was to rush up-stairs and cram every one of her things into her trunk.

When, at last, she went to bed, after telling the good news to every one she met, she tumbled and tossed and could not sleep, and finally a bright idea came into her head. It was too bright to keep to herself till morning, so she got up, and, hastily wrapping herself in a blanket, went to Rush's door.

"Rush, are you awake?" she said.

"Yes," said Rush. "I'm so glad the folks are coming that I can't go to sleep."

"Neither can I," said Nimpo, going in and sitting down on the foot of Rush's bed. "And I'll

tell you what I mean to do to-morrow. I mean to go and see Sarah, as mother told me in the letter; and I'm going to have her come up and bake bread and things, so as to have something to eat when they come."

"Oh, that'll be grand!" said Rush, eagerly, sitting up in bed. "Let's have sponge-cake and mince pies!"

"Oh, no," said Nimpo; "just bread and cookies,—oh, and pumpkin pies, and, perhaps, doughnuts."

"And we'll go down there and see her make them, and have some!" said Rush, excitedly.

"Of course, we'll go down," said Nimpo; "but we won't eat the things,—only, perhaps, a cooky or doughnut."

"Oh, yes," said Rush; "they're so nice hot. Old Primkins never gives a fellow one. Hers ain't nice, either."

"Thank the fates, we've got 'most through with Mrs. Primkins," said Nimpo, warmly. "For my part, I never want to see her again."

"How nice it'll be to be home," said Rush;

"seem's if I couldn't wait two days longer. I wish it was morning now."

"So do I," said Nimpo; "but it never will be, if I sit here." So she went to bed.

In the morning Nimpo and Rush started through the woods to Sarah's, for they could not think of going to school on such a joyful day.

They found Sarah washing on a bench out under the trees.

"Sarah! Mother's coming!" shouted Rush, as soon as he saw her.

Sarah looked around.

"Oh, 's that you! Well, I spected y'r ma'd be 'long 'bout these yere days, 'n I'm jes washin' up ready."

"Sarah," said Nimpo, "I want you to come down and bake something before she comes, to surprise her, you know."

"Sure 'nuff," said Sarah. "There won't be a bite to eat in the house, 'n I spect 'twon't hurt none to run a broom through."

Nimpo looked guilty.

"It is mussed up some, and looks real lone

some; but you come up to-morrow, and I'll help you fix up."

Sarah smiled.

"Go way now! I reckon I hain't done forgot how to clar up yet—not yet I hasn't! I'll be up the first thing. Shall I make up a batch o' pies? Punkins is good now. I done made some powerful nice ones yesterday."

Rush's mouth watered.

"Come in 'n take a bite," said Mrs. Johnson's hospitable voice at the door. "Sarah does make oncommon good pies, 'n you've had a 'mazin' long tramp."

They needed no urging, and in a moment each one received in the hand a rich golden block, cut from a square pie-tin.

"Sarah," said Nimpo, standing in the door and eating hers, "Mrs. Wilson's dog tore up one of mother's damask towels."

"La sakes!" said Sarah, holding up her hands. "I jes wish I'd a-cotched him at it! I'd a-gin him a crack over the head, nuff to beat the bref out! But how did he get it?"

"I forgot it one day, and left it out doors," said Nimpo humbly. "We played log house, and I had it for a table-cloth. Oh!—and I tore mother's white shawl."

"Lor now! I 'spects ye's been up to no end o' shines since y'r ma's been gone," said Sarah. "I hearn tell that Mah'sr Rush here done runned away."

Rush looked sheepish.

"La sakes! that's nuffin!" broke in Mrs. Johnson, who was sorry for boys. "Mose all likely young fellers done run away onct. 'Pears like ye ain't gwine to eat nuffin," she went on, as Nimpo refused a second square of the generous pie.

Nimpo laughed, and told her she hadn't eaten any thing so good since her mother went away.

"Pore chile!" said Sarah, who thought no trouble in life was so bad—at least for white folks—as not having nice things to eat. "I'll come up to-morrow, 'n make some despit nice ones. But I'll have so much clarin' up, I reckon

you better get the punkin on to stew 'fore I get thar."

"Well, I will," said Nimpo, delighted to help. And she never thought till she was half way home, that she didn't know how to stew pumpkin.

Nimpo got up the next morning feeling very much like a woman of business. As soon as breakfast was over, she took Robbie and went down to the house, while Rush ran to the farther end of the garden for a pumpkin. She had made a fire, and put the kettle on, when Rush rolled a big golden pumpkin into the kitchen.

"I don't know how they stew pumpkin," said Nimpo, "but I know I've seen Sarah cut it up somehow." So she took a knife, and went at it. To her surprise the knife wouldn't go in.

"Why what an awful hard pumpkin this is!" she said. "I don't believe I can cut it. I guess it ain't ripe."

"Pumpkins are always hard," said Rush. "I know 'cause I've made lots of jack o' lanterns, but I always take the hatchet to cut one up for the cow."

So Nimpo took the hatchet, and after awhile, by dint of much hard work, and one or two severe chops of the table, the obstinate pumpkin was reduced to small pieces, and crammed into the kettle.

"I wonder if it takes water," said Nimpo reflectively. "I guess so—it's so dry." So she filled up the kettle with water. It was boiling away furiously when Sarah came.

"Lor!" she exclaimed as soon as she caught sight of it. "What under the sun! why—what fur ye done put in so much water?"

"Is it too much?—I didn't know," said Nimpo.

"Too much!" said Sarah, snatching off the kettle, and pouring nearly all of the water into the sink. "Go long!—I sh'd think so! 'pears like ye hain't got no sense. I 'clar to goodness if ye ha'n't done leff all the skins on!"

"Do you take the skin off?" asked Nimpo, feeling very young and ignorant.

"O go way, will you!" said Sarah with a grunt, "ye'd a-better leff it alone. Ye ain't much 'count no way, 'bout cookin'."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FRIGHTENED BY AN INDIAN.

SARAH was soon up to her elbows in flour, and when engaged in the serious business of baking was, like all good cooks, rather cross to children. So Nimpo went meekly up-stairs, and took a book to read, while Robbie got out all his blocks and played on the sitting-room floor, and Rush went down to the store as usual. Just about noon, Rush came back.

"Nimpo," he said, "let's red-head pins."

"We haven't any sealing-wax," answered Nimpo, shutting her book, for the story was growing dull, and, besides, she was beginning to want some of the good things that sent up savory odors from the kitchen.

"I have," said Rush. "I found a piece down at the store, and Cousin Will said I might have it."

"Well," said Nimpo, taking the wax, which he held out, "get some pins, and we'll do it now."

Rush snatched his mother's cushion off the bureau, and ran down just in time to see the wax laid on a handy place on the kitchen stove.

"What you gwine to do?" asked Sarah, who, now that the baking was off her mind, was as pleasant as usual.

"Going to red-head pins," answered Nimpo. "If you've got an old darning-needle, I'll make you a lovely shawl-pin."

"'Pears like I had one," said Sarah. "I mos' allus has one stickin' in the wood 'side o' the winder."

And she went into her room to see.

"Yes, here's one," said she; "but yo be kereful 'bout that ar. I've heerd tell of settin' a house afire that a way."

"Oh, we'll be careful," exclaimed both the children.

"I'm gwine to clar up the chambers now, an' there's a bite 'fur ye on the dining-room table," said Sarah.

Then, arming herself with broom and dust-pan, and tying a gorgeous yellow cotton handkerchief over her head, to keep the dust out of her hair, she marched off up-stairs.

Nimpo and Rush hurried through with the red-heading business, and rushed in to lunch. They found fresh crisp doughnuts, delicious pumpkin pie, and a pitcher of milk; and they thought it a lunch fit for a queen.

After they had eaten all they could, and, in fact, emptied the table, they still sat there, talking over the delights of being at home once more, and wondering how other boys and girls could be contented to live with their parents.

"There's Anna Morris," said Nimpo. "Her mother's real cross, I think; and she's never pleasant like our mother. She's always working in the kitchen like fury. She never says 'Good morning' to me; but always hollers out, 'Wipe your feet!' I don't see how Anna can bear her."

"Yes," said Rush, "and Johnny Stevens' mother, —she whips him if he only falls down and gets

muddy some. She keeps a stick over the clock, and if he doesn't wipe his feet, or comes in muddy or with a hole torn,—how can folks help that, I'd like to know?—she just takes down that stick and beats him."

"I should think he'd run away," said Nimpo, indignantly.

"He's awful 'fraid of her," said Rush.

This little village that I'm telling about was one of the quietest and dullest towns you ever heard of; but it had one pet horror, and that was—Indians! It was not a very long time since they had been seen prowling around in the woods, and even coming to the farm-houses for something to eat. And the old settlers, who now sat in the corner by the fire, and smoked or knit,—according to their sex,—had plenty of horrible stories at their tongues' end, and delighted to tell them to groups of eager youngsters, who enjoyed having their hair stand up with horror as well as some of you do nowadays.

You may be sure that Nimpo and Rush were often found where there were stories to be heard;

so they had their minds filled with the frightful things which are told of the savages.

On this day, when they were still sitting at the table, talking about other people's mothers, and Sarah, who had just come down-stairs, was busy near the window, suddenly the door burst open, and a full-grown, frightful-looking Indian bounded in, with a war-whoop or some other unearthly yell, brandishing his tomahawk in the most threatening manner, as though he meant to scalp them all in a minute.

Sarah gave a dreadful scream and disappeared in the cellar. Nimpo, quick as thought, snatched Robbie and dashed into the pantry, instantly putting her back against the door, and bracing her feet against the flour-barrel. In a second, Rush bounced against the door, kicking violently and shouting, "Let me in!"

"I'll *never* open the door!" said Nimpo, desperately. "Go somewhere else."

"I think you're real mean!" said Rush, running to the cellar door, and trying to get in there. But Sarah held that equally tight, and told him to



"A FULL-GROWN, FRIGHTFUL-LOOKING INDIAN BOUNDED IN."—PAGE 208.

"Go 'way dar." Meantime, the Indian, amazed at the fright he had produced, for Robbie was screaming violently, spoke in his natural voice:

"Here, Nimpo, Rush, it's nobody but me—Cousin Will! I've just dressed up! Sarah, don't be such a goose. Robbie, come and see me; don't cry. Open the door."

Nimpo heard Rush laugh faintly, and say slowly, "Why, Cousin Will!" and then she opened the door a crack. There stood the awful figure, but talking to Rush in Cousin Will's voice; and on looking closely at his face, she could see, through the horrid stripes of paint, that it was, indeed, no other than Will.

Then she came out, pale and trembling still; but she had to soothe Robbie, who couldn't bear to look at him, and Sarah utterly refused to open the door. She could not so easily be reassured.

The dress was that of an Indian chief, and Will—who delighted in startling people—had borrowed it, to try its effect on the children; but he had no idea of scaring them out of their wits.

I can't tell you just how the suit was made, but it was of gay colors, and had a long fringe down each leg and arm, that, when he danced and waved his arms, flew about and made a strange, wild appearance. Then his face was painted in gaudy stripes, and five long feathers stuck out from his head.

After this valiant exploit, Master Will—who, it must be confessed, was hardly more than a great overgrown boy—made a raid upon Sarah's freshly-made store of good things, while Rush and Nimpo looked on in dismay, wishing that Sarah would come and “put a stop to it.” But Will escaped unseen, though Sarah was angry enough when she discovered what he had been doing. They could hear her muttering for a long time about “po' white trash,” and “scarin' a body's wits out,” and “stuffin' 's tho' he never had nuffin,” and so on.

“Rush,” said Nimpo, after awhile, “let's get the fires ready to light, so it'll look pleasant when father and mother come. It's cool in the evenings now, you know.”

“Well,” said Rush.

So they went out to the wood-shed, and brought in small sticks and kindling and dry chips.

"I'll fix the parlor fire," said Nimpo, "and you fix the sitting-room; and then we can light them the minute the stage stops, and it'll all be in a blaze before they get in."

These fires were built in open fire-places, such as, I fear, you young folk have never seen, excepting, perhaps, in some old-fashioned country kitchen, or in a fashionable parlor of late years. Large sticks were laid across andirons,—or fire-dogs, as some called them,—and on these Nimpo made a splendid pile of fine sticks, with a handful of shavings underneath. One match would set the whole in a blaze.

Meantime, Rush, with Robbie's valuable assistance, had made the same preparations in the sitting-room, and Sarah had put the finishing touches to the house.

"Sarah," said Nimpo, seeing her making preparations to go home. "You said you'd seen a house set afire by red-heading pins, tell us about it."

"O go long!" said Sarah, "I hain't got time!"

"O yes, you have!" said Nimpo eagerly; "it isn't near dark yet. Come, do!"

"Wall," said Sarah at last, "'tain't a long one, an' mebbly I will."

"Oh! Good! Come, Rush! Come, Robbie!" called Nimpo. "Sarah's going to tell a story."

It did not take a minute to compose the eager audience of three on chairs, and Sarah sat down on the wash bench.

"Now begin!" said Nimpo.

"Wall," Sarah began, "a long time back when I first come up from down Souf, I lived in a big city."

"Was it Cleveland?" asked Rush.

"No, Cincinnati," said Sarah. "Mis' Parker—my missis—was a rale lady—Mis' Parker was—'n Mr. Parker was a likely nuff man, but them young uns! Lor! they was nuff to raise the dead with their shines. I never see no sich young uns no whar, 'n I was raised 'mong heaps o' young uns too. Lizy, she was 'bout as big as Nimpo, 'n Johnny, he was nigh on to Rush's size,

not so hefty mebbly. Wall, one night their pa 'n ma went to meetin', 'n the very last words she said to 'em was, 'Now 'member, chillen, yo stay with Mis' Ro' (Mis' Ro was a sewin' woman), 'n steddly yo Bible lesson, 'n don't get inter mischief, 'n mind ye don't go down-stairs to boder Sarah.'"

Sarah's voice was very low and impressive, and her eyes glared out of the dark corner.

"In co'ase them wicked chillen said they wouldn't, 'n they went off, 'n I clar to goodness! 'pears like she never shet the do' 'fore they was cuttin' up fit to tear the house down. But I didn't care a mite, so's they minded their ma 'bout stay'n' up-stairs. But la sakes now! they was 'mazin' young uns to dis'member a pusson's words; 'fore long I hearn a step." Sarah rolled her eyes tragically. "I know'd they was comin' down-stairs 'gainst their ma's commands!—think o' that! Chillen, the ole black debil's allus aside o' misobedient chillen."

The listeners gave a sigh for the wickedness of the Parker children, and Sarah went on.

"Soon's ever the do' at the bottom o' the stairs

opened, I sung out, 'What did your ma say 'bout comin' down-stairs.'

'Oh,' says Lizy, says she, 'ma tole us not to boder yo, 'n we ain't gwine to boder yo, we're jes a-gwine to red-head pins.' Now red-headdin' pins ain't no sin as I knows on," said Sarah generously, "but misobeyin' mothers 's 'n a-w-f-u-l sin, an' them ar wicked chillen soon foun' it out. I know'd thar'd be trubble, so I tuk my knittin' 'n sot down in the fur corner. The wicked boy, he tuk out o' his pocket a big chunk o' wax, 'n the wicked girl, she had a hull paper o' pins I 'spect. Wall, they fixed some o' the pins, 'n some they los' in the fire, 'n some they spiled, 'n they daubed the stove till I was clean beat out I was, 'n thar was heaps mo' wax, 'n the naughty Lizy she tole Johnny to go long up-stairs, 'n fotch some mo' pins, out o' ma's draw, 'n he went; 'n now mind!" said Sarah more impressively and slowly than ever, "the bad boy tuk a can'l out the sittin'-room whar Mis' Ro was sewin', 'n he sot it down on his ma's bureau in the closet 'n opened her draw. Top o' the bureau was some shelves, 'n curtings 'fore 'em,

'n this bad boy done sot the can'l right 'n under the curtings—"

Now Sarah lowered her voice to a sort of ghastly whisper—

"'n less 'n no time it got 'spiciously light, he looked up, 'n

THE HOUSE WAS AFIRE!!!"

This last with a yell and a spring forward that made her excited audience look around in terror, expecting to see the flames rolling over them.

"What did he do?" breathlessly asked Nimpo.

"He hollered fire!" said Sarah giving the cry with dramatic effect. "The bad girl dropped the pins 'n runned up-stairs, 'n I arter her. Thar stood Mis' Ro—po' miz'able thing!—gone clean out o' her senses, a-whirlin' roun' 'n roun' like a tetotal, a-wringin' her han's an' cryin'. The bad boy was gwine to open a windy, 'n the wicked girl she hollered 'n began to spit on it," said Sarah with unspeakable disgust.

"What did you do? Was the house burnt up?" interrupted Rush.

"I had my senses leff. I jes snatched down them curtings, 'n pitched the wash pitcher o' water on 'em. That put it out, 'n I went back downstairs, but them chillen was well skeer'd that time. They know'd it was all 'cause o' their misobeyin' their ma, 'n they 'spected a good sound wallop in' when their pa 'n ma come home. Fur onct them young uns was still's a mouse, 'n when the folks cum home they done cried 'n took on awful."

"Did they get whipped?" asked Nimpo.

"Laws no, chile! folks don't allus get what's good fur 'em. Lizy's new bunnet was burnt up, 'n Johnny's Sunday hat, that's all they got, 'n they didn't keer fur that, fur they had new ones 'fore next Sunday.

"Now I'm gwine home," said Sarah putting on her sun-bonnet, "mind ye come arter me the minute y'r ma comes."

"I expect it'll be to-morrow," said Nimpo.

"I don't; folks never gits home when they spect's to," said Sarah.

CHAPTER XXXII.

COMING HOME.

THE next afternoon, when it was nearly time for the stage, the three children went down to the house, with clean clothes and faces, and hair in a wonderful state of smoothness.

Nimpo and Rush took matches in their hands to be ready, and Robbie climbed up to the window to watch. After long and tiresome waiting, they heard the driver's horn, and knew that the stage was coming round the corner. So both of them lighted matches, though with excited, trembling hands, and set fire to long paper lighters which they had prepared. And then they stood and held them, and gazed at the approaching red stage, ready, on the least sign of drawing up at the door, to stuff the torch into the shavings.

But, alas! it cruelly drove by, and Nimpo was

so surprised and grieved, that she held her paper till it burnt her fingers.

Disappointment is a hard thing to bear, and slowly and sadly the children locked up the house, and walked back to Mrs. Primkins'.

That lady stood on the steps, and something like a smile came round her mouth, though it felt so little at home that it didn't stay long.

"So your folks didn't come, eh?"

"No," said Nimpo, with a choking in her throat.

"Wall, I didn't expect 'em a mite; people 'most always get hendered on the way; likely they've had a storm on the lake, too. You better unpack your trunk now, and stay another night or two."

Poor Nimpo had locked and strapped her trunk, sure that she should never open it again at Mrs. Primkins', and now she couldn't even go to bed without getting out nightgowns and brushes. It was almost as bad to unpack that night as it was on the first day, when she was so disappointed.

The next day was fearfully long; it did seem as though school would never be out, and several times Nimpo thought the clock had stopped.

But evening came, and again the eager watchers lighted their torches and awaited with fast-beating hearts the heavy roll of the lumbering wheels. They *knew* they would come this time.

But again the hateful stage rolled by with no sign of stopping.

Robbie began to cry, and Nimpo felt very much as if she would like to cry herself, while Rush suddenly had pressing business in another part of the house.

However, they once more walked sadly back to Mrs. Primkins'.

"You'll make out your week yet," was her greeting; "here it is Friday night, and if they don't come to-morrow, they'll wait till Monday,—and that'll be just five weeks to a day."

"They *must* come before Monday," said Nimpo, greatly disturbed, for Mrs. Primkins' cool way of speaking made it seem the most natural thing in the world for them to stay a week or two longer.

"If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride," was Mrs. Primkins' irritating reply. "Wishing and hoping never brought any thing to pass

that ever I see in my experience. Waiting's the thing for us to learn. Likely your ma's stopped over to see somebody."

"If they don't come to-morrow, I never *can* wait till Monday," said Nimpo, excitedly.

"Hoity-toity! I guess you'll have to," said Mrs. Primkins, mockingly. "You've got several things to learn yet, my lady, though you're 'mazin' wise in your own conceit."

Nimpo felt that she could not stand another word, so she went on up-stairs. But on the way she made a resolution:

"If they don't come to-morrow, I'll get Sarah down to the house, and stay there till they do come. I *can't* stand it here another day."

But happiness was close by. The next morning, before they were out of bed, there came up the attic stairs a joyful sound, although it was Mrs. Primkins' voice:

"Children, your folks is come!"

With a glad cry, Nimpo sprang out of bed, and tried to dress; but never were buttons so stubborn, nor hooks and eyes so clumsy; never did strings

get so tangled, nor hair so snarled; it seemed as if she should never get her clothes on. And there was Robbie calling excitedly for her to dress him too.

As for Rush, he jumped into his clothes—as a boy will—and was down-stairs and half-way home before Nimpo was ready to begin on Robbie.

At last, however, enough buttons were adjusted to hold the clothes on, and without stopping to pack the trunk again, Nimpo and Robbie set off on a run for home.

Before they were half-way there, they met Rush, wheeling a wonderful little wheel-barrow, which mother had brought for Robbie.

Robbie could not get by that, and Nimpo let go of his hand and rushed on alone.

In a moment she was, to her surprise, sobbing in her mother's arms.

"Oh, mother! I'm so glad you've come!" was all she could say.

"Then you prefer home to boarding, after all, do you, dear?" said her mother, kissing her.

"Oh, mother!" Nimpo broke out penitently,

"I've had nothing but trouble since you went away! I've got into more scrapes than ever in my life before! I've spoilt your black alpaca dress, and torn your white shawl, and—and—I can't tell half the mischief we've done."

"Well, never mind now," said Mrs. Rievor; "you can tell me by and by. Now come and see what I have brought you."

I shall not tell you of Nimpo's presents, and the book of poems; for, glad as she was to get them, they were nothing when compared with the best gift of all—her home and her mother.

END.

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